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MUSIC AND MANNERS

IN

FRANCE AND GERMANY:

A

SERIES OF TRAVELLING SKETCHES

OF

Art and Society.

4048.17
V. 1, K

BY HENRY F. CHORLEY,

AUTHOR OF "CONTI," ETC. ETC.

"Praising all, is praising none."—*Burney.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

1844.

73849

Townsend fd
May 15, 1866.

TO

JOHN RUTTER CHORLEY,

These Sketches

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY

HIS BROTHER.

ADVERTISEMENT.

When I first began to indulge myself with a few holiday weeks in France and Germany, it was as little likely that I should ever publish any thing on the Manners of either country, as it was probable that I should ever take pen in hand to write about Art in the days when I used to leave my bed betimes to hammer out Hook's harpsichord lessons and the "Battle of Prague" on the feeblest of all old-fashioned square piano-fortes. The public will care little for the temptations which have led me to venture an essay then so little contemplated; but I hope I may be permitted, for honesty's sake, to state the amount and nature of the materials from which the following sketches of Music and Manners have been arranged, with a constant reference to English wants and English capabilities.

They are the fruit of six journeys. As I have travelled for the most part alone, a diary, for one sufficiently habituated when at home to pen-work, was only a natural companion. As, moreover, I have never, since the days of Hook and Kotzwara, been able to listen to music without speculating upon the circumstances which gave it peculiarity of form and character, or noticing the place as well as the manner of its execution, — it was, again, not unnatural that a favourite pursuit, indulged in a manner which links it with so many engaging subjects of fancy and observation, should give a predominant colour to my familiar chronicle of Paris, and Berlin, and Dresden. But only one of my journals was kept with the slightest reference to Paternoster Row, or any of its dependencies. My rambles have been strictly holiday ones, in which uncertain health has often prevented me from availing myself of opportunities which I dared not have neglected had I gone forth with the slightest idea of collecting materials for a book. When, however, I agreed to publish a few of my notes, it was the least I could do, by a

journey last autumn undertaken for the purpose, to verify or correct impressions thoughtlessly noted, certain of which, I felt, might have partaken too largely of the whim or the sympathy of the moment to be given forth without after-check or sanction. The few chapters which owe their origin to closet-thought and casual research will be readily distinguished from the transcripts of my own experiences made on the spot. As regards the latter, I have omitted much, as too personal in detail; and I have wrought out, here and there, a thought which was merely indicated in the original: but I have interpolated little or nothing with the aim of "making up a show." It has been my endeavour, besides selecting such passages as should illustrate the present state of theatrical, orchestral, and chamber music abroad, to dwell upon such points as I conceived least familiar to my masters and fellow-students in the art at home. Wherever I have stated results as facts, I have done my best to obtain the warrant of accomplished French and Ger-

man friends, well versed in the subjects discussed.

All these things premised, I cannot but feel some anxiety on seeing my book complete. Slight as it is, it touches directly upon so many master-works of Art, and sideways upon so many graver questions, the approach of which is no holiday undertaking, — that I cannot wholly retreat from hesitation and self-distrust into the consciousness of an honest purpose. If but a few entertain the result of my labours kindly, I shall be content: and, by any amount of correction from those who have thought on the subject I have so much at heart, I shall be more gratified than by the largest measure of undiscriminating praise.

H. F. C.

June 7. 1841.

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

THE GRAND OPERA OF PARIS.

CHAP. I.

"ESMERALDA."

Preparatory. — Current English, American, Italian, and German Opinions of the French Opera. — First Day in Paris. — Mademoiselle Bertin attacked and defended. — First Impressions of a French Theatre. — French Female Composers. — Madame de Montgeroult. — Madame Bigot. — Madame Farrenc. — Madame Laguerre. — Madame Gail. — Mademoiselle Loisa Puget. — Mademoiselle Bertin's "Loup Garou" and "Fausto." — "Notre Dame de Paris" dramatised by its Author. — The Music. — The Orchestra of L'Académie Royale, — Its Numbers, — Its Precision, — M. Habeneck its Conductor, — Its Failure in Italian Music. — Total Failure of "Esmeralda" - - - Page 1

CHAP. II.

THE DROP-CURTAIN.

The Half-hour before the Spectacle. — The Drop-curtain at L'Académie an historical Picture. — First beginnings of French Opera. — Charles the Ninth's Charter and *Réglement*. — Baïf, a Diplomatist and Poet. — The Poet's Predominance in the early Days of the Lyrical Drama: — obliged to yield to Melody in Italy; to Harmony in Germany. — French *Esprit* and Court Favour in part determining the Character of French Opera. — Louis Quatorze. — The Marquis de Sourdeac. — Lalande. — Lulli. — Molière. — Madame de Lafayette and Madame de Sévigné. — The Opera under Louis Quinze. — Mondonville's "Titan et Aurore." — Voltaire and Rameau. — The "*Clavecin Oculaire*" of Père Castel. — The Opera under Louis Seize. — The Gluck and Piccini Quarrel. — Gluck's Influences and Conformings significant. — The Conseil Municipale in 1793. — Beaupré's Reminiscences of General Henriot and Lainé. — The Consulate. — Napoleon's Interest in Music; his Patronage of Lesueur and Spontini. — The Opera under the Restoration. — Characteristics to be derived from these scattered Notices - Page 23

CHAP. III.

THE "MYSTERY" OF YOUNG FRANCE. — "ROBERT LE DIABLE."

Meyerbeer's Operas essentially typical of Young France. — English Misapprehension. — Mr. Hogarth's Cha-

racter of "Robert." — "Robert" a Mystery. — Tendency towards Mysticism in Modern French Imagination. — The Church and the Opera. — M. Véron's allegorical Scenery. — French Mysticism sensual, not spiritual. — Its Expression in Meyerbeer's Music. — Peculiarity of Style. — Originality orchestral rather than vocal. — Meyerbeer an Elaborator. — Eloquent Defence of Elaboration by George Sand. — *Robert*, a Figure new to French Opera. — His Chivalry, — His Courtesy. — Nourrit the best *Robert*. — Nourrit as a Singer. — The Retirement of Singers. — Nourrit as a Man, — Anecdotes of his last Days. — A Conversation with M. Berlioz. — His Suicide. — *Alice*, an original Creation. — The Music of her Part. — *Bertram*. — Mixture of Levity with French Mysticism. — Infernal Ballets. — Rumoured Duel between M. Janin and the Comte Walewski. — The Laffarge Trial. — The Consistency of the whole Tissue. — Levity a Hindrance in Art - - - - - - - Page 44

CHAP. IV.

THE ART OPERA — "STRADELLA."

Les Gants jaunes. — A Peep into their Box at L'Académie. — Success of French Operas in England. — English and French Amateurship. — Breakfast. — Trial of "Stradella." — Bachelor's Apartments. — Sir E. L. Bulwer's "Man of the World." — M. le Prince de la Moskowa. — M. le Prince Belgiojoso. — The Music of "Stradella;" — Cause of its Failure; — Its

quasi-Italian Style. — A Word upon Eclecticism. — Paër. — Mayer. — Chélard. — Halévy. — Cabals against "Stradella." — The Organ destroyed. — The Libretto, by M. Emile Deschamps. — Its Class of Subject favourite. — "Le Luthier de Vienne." — "La Symphonie." — "Benvenuto Cellini." — "L'Ambassadrice." — Other Plays and Fictions of the same Class; — whether its Popularity be good for Art or otherwise. Page 90

CHAP. V.

THE NATIONAL OPERA — "GUILLAUME TELL."

Anticipation and Fulfilment. — "Guillaume Tell" out of fashion. — M. Eugene Sue. — Anecdotes of Rossini. — How he served Galli. — Rossini and the Drummer. — "Guillaume Tell" in fashion. — Duprez. — Lady Morgan's Judgment of "Guillaume Tell." — Patriotic Operas, and the "Three Glorious Days." — M. Jouy's *Libretto* deficient. — Rossini's general Conception of his Subject. — The Truth of his Colouring. — "Le Vieux de la Montagne." — Reputed Plagiarisms. — A Word concerning Handel. — Rossini's musical Skill legitimately evidenced in "Guillaume Tell." — Its second Act. — Analysis. — The Hunters' Chorus. — Expectation in Music. — The Duet. — The Trio. — Passage from Shelley's "Hellas." — The Finale. — Passage from George Sand's "Lettres d'un Voyageur." — The *Airs de Ballet*. — The Tyrolienne and Taglioni. — The Steps of Frescati's - - - 109

CHAP VI.

DUPREZ.

French Tenor-Singing. — Garat. — Geliotte. — Elleviou. — Foolish Rumours concerning Duprez. — First Impression of his Appearance. — A Sketch of his early Days ; — His Training in Italy ; — His Position on his Arrival at Paris ; — His *Début* in " Guillaume Tell." — The last Song. — The Part of *Arnold*. — Duprez ill supported. — Duprez as an Actor in " La Muette ; " — in " La Juive." — Duprez as *Otello*. — Extract from Journal. — A young Spanish Princess. — The present Position of Duprez in Paris. — Failure of the "Benvenuto Cellini" of M. Berlioz. — *Feuilleton* of the latter, touching Theatricals in general, and Duprez in particular. — Whimsical Calculation of his Emoluments ; — their influence on Opera - Page 138

CHAP. VII.

THE MASTERPIECE OF FRENCH OPERA — " LES HUGUENOTS."

Morning in old Paris. — First Introduction to " Les Huguenots." — M. Vèron and " La Juive." — Spectacle. — Feelings and Furniture. — Brilliant Scenery. — The Subject of " Les Huguenots " foretold in the Grimm and Diderot Correspondence. — Anticipated by Lee and Purcell. — Other English Anticipations. — Why " Les Huguenots " is the Masterpiece of French Opera. — Its Purpose. — George Sand's Letter to Meyerbeer. — Limits of Character-Music. — *Marcel*

and the *Corale*. — *Valentine* and Mademoiselle Falcon. — The latter's melancholy Story. — True Character of the Music of "Les Huguenots." — Its *Solos* thoroughly French. — Its Choruses. — Sketch of the first — second — third Acts. — The Septuor. — The fourth Act. — "*La Benediction des Poignards*." — The grand Duet. — Respective Limits of Opera and Tragedy. — The closing Scenes. — Conclusion - - - Page 167

THE BRUNSWICK FESTIVAL.

CHAP. I.

THE JOURNEY AND THE REHEARSAL.

Hamburg to Haarburg. — Steam-boat Groups. — German Good-Nature. — Haarburg to Soltau. — Bookcase at Soltau. — Celle. — Brunswick. — Its picturesque Features. — The Blauen Engel. — The Egydien-Kirche. — Beethoven's Symphony in C minor. — A Word to our own Festival Committees. — Diligence of the Orchestra. — Dr. Mendelssohn Bartholdy. — A Sketch (not personal). — Care in Rehearsal. - - - 209

CHAP. II.

First Day.

THE ORATORIO. — THE DINNER.

Early Hours in Brunswick. — Primitive Equipages. — A Retrospect of a Dublin Festival with Paganini. — Contrasts in Costume. — A Word upon Costumes at Home.

— Honours to Dr. Mendelssohn. — The Popularity of the "St. Paul" compared with that of "The Last Judgment." — Its Freedom from Manner, — Its Dramatic Effects, — Its four great Songs. — The Performance compared with English Performances. — The Singers: — Madame Fischer-Achten, — Herr Fischer, — Herr Schmetzer. — The Reception of "St. Paul"— German and English Modesty. — The Dinner. — The Decorations. — Impudent Englishman. — The Cookery. — The Musical Honours. — "Dankes-Gruss." — A straightforward Dialogue. — The Climax and Close of the Feast - - - - - Page 230

CHAP. III.

Second Day.

THE ORATORIO. — THE BALL.

Length of English and German Entertainments. — Bach and Mendelssohn. — The Dom-Kirche. — Organ-playing. — Honours to Mendelssohn. — The German Chorus-Singer in London. — The Post-Boy at Cologne. — The Prussian Corporal. — The Oratorio. — False Taste in the *Programme* (with a Note on the Schwerin Festival of 1840). — German Performance of Handel. — The Ball. — A Glance at a Volksfest at Marksuhl. — More Honours to Mendelssohn. — His Coronation in the Theatre. — English Opinions on such an Apotheosis, with a Word on the social Treatment of Musicians in England. — The Ball - 254

CHAP. IV.

Third Day.

MENDELSSOHN'S CONCERT. — THE OPERA.

Programme of the Concert. — Schmetzer's Singing. — Müller's Violin-playing. — Molique's Concertos. — Mendelssohn's Pianoforte-playing compared with that of Moscheles, Chopin, Liszt. — His Fancy. — The End of the Concert. — The End of an English Festival, with a Thought of Malibran. — Dinner. — King Ernest of Hanover's English Followers. — The New Palace at Brunswick. — The Hof Theater. — More North German Good-Nature. — "Guido and Ginevra." — Well-contrived Stage Arrangements. — A Word upon Classicality. — French Operas with German Words. — The Performance. — Schmetzer. — Pöck. — Madame Fischer-Achten. — The fourth Act. — The Catastrophe of my Evening - - - - Page 272

ERRATA IN "THE GRAND OPERA OF PARIS."

Page 8. line 7. for "M. Bertin Vaux," read "M. Bertin de Vaux."
10. line 3. for "*courant de soir*," read "*courant du soir*."
— line 6. for "*la programme*," read "*le programme*."
14. line 8. from bottom, for "Le Cour des Miracles," read "La Cour," &c.
36. *note*, line 5. for "La Temple," read "Le Temple."
68. line 12. for "un chimère." read "une chimère."
66. line 20. in "fine ears," *dele* "fine."
77. line 16. for "Normandie," read "la Normandie."
85. line 6. for "*bleue*," read "*bleu*."
87. line 4. for "*Le Seduction*," read "*La Seduction*."
88. line 1. for "belles esprits," read "beaux esprits."
118. line 6. from bottom, for "San Carlos," read "San Carlo's."
— line 2. from bottom, for "opera," read "operas."
142. line 7. for "our own," read "their own."
143. line 3. from bottom, for "San Carlos," read "San Carlo's."
— line 2. from bottom, for "Le Bravo," read "Il Bravo."
164. *note*, line 8. for "*francs*," read "*livres*."
167. line 7. from bottom, for "Le Benediction," read "La Bénédiction."
175. line 12. for "Lac de fees," read "Lac des Fées."

MUSIC AND MANNERS

IN

FRANCE.

THE GRAND OPERA IN PARIS.

" Les Allemands rêvent, les Italiens chantent, les Français jasent la musique."

MUSIC AND MANNERS

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FRANCE.

THE GRAND OPERA.

CHAPTER I.

ESMERALDA.

Preparatory. — Current English, American, Italian, and German Opinions of the French Opera. — First Day in Paris. — Mademoiselle Bertin attacked and defended. — First Impressions of a French Theatre. — French Female Composers. — Madame de Montgeroult. — Madame Bigot. — Madame Farrenc. — Madame Laguerre. — Madame Gail. — Mademoiselle Loisa Puget. —Mademoiselle Bertin's "Loup Garou" and "Fausto." — "Notre Dame de Paris" dramatised by its Author. — The Music. — The Orchestra of L'Académie Royale, — Its Numbers, — Its Precision, — M. Habeneck its Conductor, — Its Failure in Italian Music. — Total failure of "Esmeralda."

WITHOUT being as over curious as Elia, when he demanded "a rationale of sauces, a theory of mixed flavours, and the ability of a reason for the relish that is in us," if we would suit the

preparations of dinner to the pleasures of the evening, an old fashioned beef-steak and a pint of port should prelude one of Shakspeare's plays; the risotto and the macaroni of a genuine Italian *tratteria* introduce the languid voluptuous cavatinas of the Donnizettis and the Bellinis; a modicum of champagne tune the spirits to the gay pitch of the Opera Comique, and an exquisite French dinner (why not at Vefour's?), unspoiled by barbarian English notions, be performed as a reasonable prologue to a first night at L'Académie Royale.

To speak seriously—the mind, if not the body, should be prepared to take its part in all national amusements, with something of the national spirit. Yet, how many Englishmen are there, who, by having cultivated such Catholicism, are capable of pronouncing a judgment upon the Grand Opera of the French? It has been again and again called by our tourists and journal writers, nay, and by our professed critics, a heavy, noisy, splendid, fatiguing amusement,—a pageant without singers, palling upon the eye, and either deafening or lacerating the ear. Your

English neighbour at the table d'hote, looks down upon you, if you talk of "La Muette" or "La Juive," while he expatiates upon the stall secured at the Italian Theatre to hear Grisi's delicious notes, or Tamburini's roulades, for the thousandth time, exactly as they are to be heard in London, but in a much smaller and shabbier *locale*. Your American*, to whom all singers are alike, save on hearsay, is a great *ballet* fancier, and therefore will patronise l'Académie sometimes; but in a delicious confusion as to whether Duprez was or was not a pupil of the elder Vestris, and quite certain that Fanny Elssler's steps are better than Cinti Damoreau's were! Your Italian, again, will shake his handsome head, while he appeals against Meyerbeer

* I was one evening instructed by a Transatlantic neighbour thus casually encountered—and, save for his pretensions to connoisseurship, a most agreeable companion — that there were only second-rate singers at the Italian Opera in Paris. "The best," he continued, "come to us, and belonged to the company which were in Havannah last winter." "And what has become of them?" — "They are all dead, sir," was the answer, "dead of the yellow fever!"

as a severe composer, without sentiment, or grace, or passion, and talks to you in the next breath of the delicious soirée at Madame la Princesse Belgiojoso's, or Madame la Comtesse Merlin's, where Rubini sung the cavatina from "Niobe," so as to make a *furore*, and where the opinion was that Pauline Garcia may turn out too bizarre and classical. Your German, forgetting how they order matters at home, will denounce Paris as the grave of musical sense and solidity: — just as if (to use his countrywoman's homely figure) he could shake from his sleeve Mozarts, and Glucks, and Beethovens, and Webers, by the dozen. How often do the words, "It is" and "It is not," when rightly translated, mean "I like" and "I will not like!" And yet, in spite of all these *dicta* — which in sober truth are things remembered, not imagined,— there is nothing now in Europe like L'Académie Royale.

It was late in the November of 1836, on a Monday evening,— my first in Paris,— that this conviction burst upon me. After one night in the foreign mail, and two in the diligence from

Calais, — with a gasconading American, a rude sprightly young *Moustache* from St. Omer's, a Swiss who would sing snatches of all the music he had ever heard most Swiss-*ly* out of tune, and a negro, by way of companions, — no one short of a Hercules could have much spirits or strength left for music. But, on sitting down to dinner — my eyes burning for sleep, and my brain jarred with the ceaseless noises of the last thirty-six hours — I got engaged, Heaven knows how! in a question which has often amused me in calmer moments of day-dreaming; namely, the possibility, or otherwise, of a woman producing a worthy musical composition. The occasion of the debate was the third—at all events the last—performance of Mademoiselle Bertin's "Esmeralda," which was to take place that evening. One of her defenders, at the top of his lungs, was expatiating on her force and originality in instrumentation, and declaring that the orchestra, M. Habeneck, its conductor included, had leagued itself in an ungallant cabal to play out of tune whenever "Esmeralda" was to be given. His antagonist, half

a tone at least shriller, was indignantly replying that all that was good in the score was the work of M. Berlioz ("He had peppered it," were his precise words), and that the orchestra was right to withstand an overweening cabal made by the writers of Le Journal des Débats, with M. Bertin Vaux, Pair de France, chief proprietor and father of the composer, at its head. One might as well have been in Morocco, as unqualified to scold about Mademoiselle Bertin and M. Victor Hugo. What will you have on't? (as Mrs. Quickly's ghost said to Dr. Goldsmith) — Seven o'clock found me in L'Académie.

The first evening in any French theatre is not a thing to be forgotten, unless the visiter be singularly splenetic and slow to move. If he be permitted to enter, there is a comfortable seat for him, to be gained without his exposing himself to the gymnastics of an English pit. Without his being disturbed by the shrieks of an English gallery, he will be struck by an understanding of and sympathy with the stage, on the part of the audience; — by its universal vivacity and cheerfulness, and settled purpose to be amused. It is questionable whether the most indefatigable

croaker could hunt out, in all the theatres, great and small, of Paris, on their fullest holiday evening, one single solitary figure of national growth to match our indigenous stout gentleman dragged from his fireside by his hearty wife and "his girls," and grumbling so often as he feels the cushion hard, or the bench narrow, or the air hot, — " So you call this pleasure, do you? Catch me at a play-house again in a hurry." Nor is there any of that odd confusion of ideas as to place, person, and performance, so amusingly manifested at such of our theatres as are frequented for Fashion's sake. We are growing more enlightened, it is true: but I have heard a comfortable gentleman, after staring through an act and nine-tenths of " La Gazza Ladra," say to his better half, who sat at his side with half a pint of lavender-water in her lap, " My love, what is the piece? " Every one in Paris, on the contrary, seems to know the whole history, private and public, of his evening's amusement, — has his own friend in the orchestra ;—the gentleman with the peculiarly black beard, who is *oboe primo*, I think, at the Opéra Comique, has many friends. Every one has his own favourite in the

ballet, — can prophesy costumes, decorations, and *coups de théâtre ;* or, if not so well instructed, will be seen putting himself *au courant de soir* by devouring the contents of the ephemeral sheets which fly about the theatre ; — while the hasty cries of "*V'la la programme !*" "*V'la l'Entr'acte !*" "*V'la la Pièce !*" "*Analyse !*" "*Vertvert !*" of the vendors, here, there, and everywhere, add their part to the cheerful bustle, and stimulate the stranger's expectation. On this my first visit, being late and inexperienced, I fell by chance into a place vacated for me, in the centre of the pit, and, what was less to the purpose, fell into the midst of a host of *claqueurs*, who, to judge from their grimy blackness, might be devils belonging to M. Bertin's Journal.

Under such circumstances of distraction it must have required cleverer music than Mademoiselle Bertin's to have graven a deep impression on my memory. But I have since learned more concerning her enterprises, which are remarkable enough, on the part of a woman, to merit attention. In instrumental virtuosi of the gentler sex Paris has been always rich.

The name of Madame de Montgeroult, as a professor of the piano, and whose method still lingers among the older text-books of the Conservatoire, is not to be forgetten. Neither should that of Madame Bigot, since, independently of her modest skill as a composer, her genius led her in advance of her townsmen, and made her foremost to introduce Beethoven's music to the French, when the latter had not begun even to affect German sympathies. Madame Farrenc is of our own time, who also devotes herself to classical chamber-composition, and writes pianoforte quintetts, which are worthy, according to the critics, of honourable mention. Nor has vocal music been without its priestesses of note and ambition. A hundred and fifty years ago, Madame Laguerre* had made herself so

* This virtuosa must not be confounded with Mademoiselle Laguerre the singer, who flourished at a much later period; and who, for her gross tastes and disgraceful habits, could only be called a *chanteuse*, not a *cantatrice* of L'Académie Royale, if the old French distinction were kept up, which made the first word a reproach, and the second a title of honour. On the second representation of Piccini's "Iphigenie en Tauride," the state of intoxication in which she appeared on the stage seriously

eminent in her maiden days by her improvisations on the organ and harpsichord, as to have attracted the favour of the brilliant Madame de Montespan, with whom she continued as chamber-musician for three years; subsequently producing a great work of her own composition "Cephalus and Procris," at the Grand Opera, and in 1721 a "Te Deum," which was executed in the chapel of the Louvre, on the occasion of the recovery of the then King. Nearer to our own remembrance we had Madame Gail, who sung as gracefully as she composed, and whose "Les Deux Jaloux" had such success at the Théâtre Feydeau in 1815, that Boieldieu did not hesitate to associate himself with her in another opera, "Angela." Later still, at the same time that Mademoiselle Bertin was trying to carry the theatre of the Rue Lepelletier by storm, Mademoiselle Loisa Puget was enjoying an easier triumph at the Opera Comique by her pretty one-act operetta, "Le Mauvais Œil"

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endangered the opera. She was profusely hissed, and placarded by the witty Sophie Arnould with the name of "Iphigenie en Champagne." She died in 1783, in her twenty-eighth year.

—thanks to Madame Cinti Damoreau's exquisite singing of her brilliant rondo. But all these undertakings are small and trifling when compared with a five-act lyric drama at the present day, for the most exacting stage and the most difficult public in Europe—a drama produced, too, when the gigantic effects of "Les Huguenots" were still in all the freshness of their novelty. Mademoiselle Bertin seems from the first to have shown not only the boldest ambition, but also a tendency towards the dark and mysterious in subject. Before she wrote "Esmeralda," there were already on record against her an operetta, "Le Loup Garou," and an Italian version of "Faust," the latter of course a failure—Mephistopheles and Margaret's lover being alike beyond the powers of music. But a paragraph is extant in the "*Nachgelassene Werke*" of Göthe concerning the score, which is in some sort an immortality; and I was told of a duet between Faust and Margaret in the street — in its beauty little less delicate and seductive than the duet "*Segui o cara*," which fills the same situation in Spohr's opera. Undaunted by failure,

Mademoiselle Bertin chose for her third essay the next intractable subject to the "Faust" which modern genius has produced; for Quasimodo is scarcely more susceptible of musical illustration than the student or his familiar. Nor was Victor Hugo's romance made the fitter for the operatic stage, because Victor Hugo chose himself to dramatise it. The destruction which other librettists work on the most strongly-marked and simple subjects, — witness the operatic treatment of Scott's "Bride of Lammermoor," — he has wrought himself. Skilful as he is in the management of stage effect, he knows not the secret of Opera — how far, in spite of the trammels of the musician, situation may go, and character be drawn. The scene of the first act was laid in "Le Cour des Miracles," the squalid loathsomeness of which was, of necessity, so far mitigated, that its spirit was lost. The main feature of the second act was the scene at the pillory, which recalls to me at the moment of writing a chorus of women, pretty and piquant enough to have been a waif from Mademoiselle Puget's domain. The grand trio (which is

now, it seems, an essential feature in every French opera) was the terrible interview at Falourdel's tavern — the passion of which again was of necessity entirely tamed to suit *les convenances* of representation; while the fourth act — containing an effective bellringer's song for Quasimodo, said to be the contribution of M. Berlioz, which was given with a rude energy by Massol — opened with a dungeon scene for Esmeralda, and closed in the Parvis of Notre Dame. There had been a fifth act, contrived by M. Hugo, so said sarcastic journalists, to take place upon the towers of the cathedral — the *personæ*, Claude Frollo, the Hunchback, and certain owls: but this the management had retrenched as indiscreet, and had substituted the more practicable operatic tableau of the heroine dying on the steps of the cathedral, while the portal unclosing displayed the illuminated perspective beyond, with priests, choristers, censer-bearers, &c. — a faint copy, in short, of the last decoration of "Robert le Diable." Thus the whole story was at once the slightest of the slight — the most melo-dramatic of melodrama. M. Hugo's

words for music were, moreover, not half so tractable as the *clinquant* which M. Scribe gives to his partners, though the one is a poet and master of rhythm and lyrical climax, and the other but a manufacturer of long and short lines. Had I even not been very sleepy in the first instance, I must have yawned over music so colourless and pretending — in spite of the luxury of a chorus, the like of which I had never *seen* before, and in spite of the Esmeralda and Phœbus and Claude Frollo of the opera introducing me to Mademoiselle Falcon, and MM. Nourrit and Levasseur.

But weary though I was, and distracted from the stage by the commodious splendours of the house, by the brilliancy of the audience, and by the thousand sounds of Parisian animated life, then all new and amusing to me — the impression made upon me by the orchestra that evening, and deepened by every subsequent visit, will never fade away. There are things for the right appreciation of which no comparison is needed — such as the "*Sono innocente!*" of Pasta in "Otello," or the "*Figlia! ti male-*

dico!" of Lablache in the same opera, or the "*Suivez moi!*" of Duprez in "Guillaume Tell," or Malibran's "Sing ye unto the Lord" in Handel's "Israel," or Thalberg's hand upon the piano. They go to the heart at once as supreme, and not to be surpassed of their kind; and if our enthusiasm for them become a prejudice, it is one which, in the first instance, has been startled into life by some display which so entirely satisfies as well as startles, that a slight tenacity in yielding it up on any new temptation is surely excusable. Such is my feeling with regard to the orchestra of L'Académie. What a brilliancy is there in its violins, when their strength is put forth in such sparkling passages as accompany the Fishermen's Chorus in "La Muette" or wind up the overture to "Guillaume Tell!" What a clearness and body of support, and pertinence of answer, and sensitiveness of expression in the violoncellos! Nor are the wind instruments inferior, though perhaps less dazzling in their peculiarity: if their tone be not of the highest quality, and partake somewhat of that thin shrillness which seems

generic to all wind-tones (the human voice included) in France, they are still admirable for their certainty, for their freedom from grossness, and for the subdued but not subordinate part they take in the dialogue of the score. When matters are pushed to an extremity, they can speak loudly enough, and still not too loudly. Indeed, the double drums allowed for, — and these, of late, have seemed to my ear less wooden and overweening than formerly, — I think that the charge of noise brought against the French orchestra is a popular fallacy. *

* The *réglement* of L'Académie, given in MM. Choron and Lafage's "Nouveau Manuel Complet de Musique," and on the same authority unalterable, rates the forces of this admirable orchestra at seventy-seven persons, with two *chefs*. This is a much smaller number than is given in Mr. Graham's excellent "Essay on the Theory and Practice of Musical Composition," where the stringed instruments reach that figure, to say nothing of wind-instruments doubled, four harps, and the additional means in the shape of new cornets, *claroni*, and the yet more senseless rout of cymbals, gongs, triangles — what the Germans call Janissary-music in short — by which the newest composers, agonising after fresh combinations, attempt to disguise meagreness of invention.

Powerful it is, but the foundation of stringed instruments is so substantially clear and firm, that the tissue (to speak fancifully) never loses its coherence by the ornaments and embroideries assuming an undue prominence. Then there is an uniform but well-proportioned care in finish, and consent of execution — an understanding with the chorus — an understanding with the singers — a sensitiveness as to every nicest gradation of time, slackened or hastened, never displayed by our most sensitive English

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The *réglement* also enumerates among the regular members of this magnificent establishment three *chefs de chant*, twenty-one artists, thirty male and twenty-four female choristers, nine or more attendants : — for the *ballet*, three *maitres de ballet*, twenty-six artists, thirty figurants, thirty *figurantes*, eleven or more attendants, fifty-two persons in the wardrobe, sixty-one in the department of scenery and decorations. The minuteness with which, every possible contingency is met and provided for by this musical state paper, is a thing to be admired in this country of ours, as containing the secret of the prosperity of the Grand Opera. I had thoughts of giving the document in full ; its length, however, deterred me : and I can but earnestly recommend it to all who are interested in the matter.

orchestras, — which carry on the enchantment; it is a machine, in short, in perfect order, and under the guidance of experience and intellect; — for these, as regards French music, are thoroughly personified in M. Habeneck. Nothing can exceed his perfect sway over his forces. Though he directs with his violin bow, I have never seen him use it; and by the exquisite neatness and precision of the least important or most unmanageable instruments (the *piccoli*, for example), as they enter, not *scramble*, into their parts when the composition demands them, it may be seen that his presence is every where — that his method and meaning have pervaded the whole hundred he commands ere they are paraded before the public. I insist the more strongly on rehearsal and conduct having their fullest share in excellencies, which every lover of orchestral performance must relish so exquisitely, from having heard this same perfect band as inexact, as inapprehensive, as the commonest collection of pipes and wires that know just how to keep together — and in music far less complicated, both as to design and

detail, than the fatiguing works it is used to execute. This was on the occasion of Duprez and Pauline Garcia appearing together in the third act of "Otello." That act, to be sure, was part of the monstrous performance of a benefit night; but it was difficult to conceive how the same individuals who execute the immense finales of Rossini, and Meyerbeer, and Halèvy, with such metallic certainty and sharpness of touch, should stumble heavily through a symphony at once so suggestive and so simple as the few dreamlike and melancholy bars which precede the rising of the curtain to disclose the sadness of poor Desdemona.

But I am growing wearisome, as all are apt to do on a favourite subject. How can an orchestra be described in writing? "Esmeralda" was over, and received with such coldness as amounted to a prohibition of its further performance, in spite of my neighbours the *claqueurs;* the brilliant, animated, motley audience poured out of the wide avenues, — to judge from their vivacious and impatient criti-

cisms, of good Owen Feltham's mind, when he declared,

> "I am confirmed in my belief,—
> No woman hath a soul"—

at least as far as musical composition is concerned.

Since that evening I have not heard a whisper or encountered one printed syllable concerning the further progress in music of Mademoiselle Bertin. Her fellow-labourer, however, has not forgotten her, as may be seen by the earnest epistolary confession — I mean the poem "Sagesse," which closes Victor Hugo's last volume of fugitive verses, "Les Rayons et les Ombres."

CHAP. II.

THE DROP-CURTAIN.

The Half-hour before the Spectacle. — The Drop-curtain at L'Académie an historical Picture.—First beginnings of French Opera. — Charles the Ninth's Charter and *Réglement*. — Baïf, a Diplomatist and Poet. — The Poet's Predominance in the early Days of the lyrical Drama; — obliged to yield to Melody in Italy; to Harmony in Germany. — French *Esprit* and Court Favour; in part determining the Character of French Opera. — Louis Quatorze. — The Marquis de Sourdeac. — Lalande. — Lulli. — Molière. — Madame de Lafayette and Madame de Sévigné. — The Opera under Louis Quinze. — Mondonville's "Titan et Aurore."— Voltaire and Rameau. — The "*Clavecin Oculaire*" of Père Castel. — The Opera under Louis Seize. — The Gluck and Piccini Quarrel. — Gluck's Influences and Conformings significant. — The Conseil Municipale in 1793. — Beaupré's Reminiscences of General Henriot and Lainé. — The Consulate. — Napoleon's Interest in Music; his patronage of Lesueur and Spontini. — The Opera under the Restoration. — Characteristics to be derived from these scattered Notices.

THERE is a certain pleasure in seeing a public place gradually filled by its assembly — in

watching vacant benches and gloomy corners, one after the other, painted with forms and colours, which turn out to be human beings. Even at the Coronation, the six hours of expectation which elapsed between the time when the public crowded into Westminster Abbey and the Lady of the day appeared, were assuredly not long ones. If there be any who share this taste with me, I would invite them to take *stalle* or box at L'Académie a quarter of an hour before M. Habeneck makes his appearance; not, however, to watch the bright-looking exquisitely-dressed ladies gliding into the *balcon* — not to catch snatches of the odd, blithe, vehement dialogue which goes on in the *parterre* — nor yet to give themselves up to the perusal of the *Entr'acte* of the evening. That interesting publication I would fain supersede for one night by offering a brief study of the drop-curtain of the Grand Opera.

This is not one of those venerable veils of dingy green baize, the sight of which has awakened such an undefined and thrilling curiosity within many a young playgoer on his

first night; nor yet a splendid piece of mock upholstery, like that which has so long swayed to and fro to conceal the Grisis and Rubinis, the machinists and the loungers of our own opera stage. Neither is it the old most irrational design of eight mounted cavaliers, preparing from a central pillar to ride down eight flights of steps, which used to give me an impression of insecurity and discomfort whenever I entered L'Académie, sufficient to distract me from all speculations on the three tiny fingers, or the one bright eye, which are never wanting to both of the two peepholes of the *toile*. The new curtain in the Rue Lepelletier is a grand historical composition, representing none other than Louis Quatorze signing the charter which he granted to Lulli for the establishment of a national opera. Though it be poor as a piece of painting — tawdry and indistinct — ponder it well: the device of that curtain is *apropos* to the character as well as to the history of the French lyric drama. The monarch is not alone: wits and courtiers are round about him, and the recipient of his bounty is one who was clever in repartee

as well as wise in counterpoint. It is the continuance of the close connection between the nobility and *esprit* of France and its musical theatre, that has in some degree coloured the style of the works represented on its stage.

Nearly one hundred years before the gracious dispensation here pictured was granted — nearly fifty before the publication of "*Ein schönes Singtspil von dreyen bösen Weiben*" in Nuremburg, from which the annalists of music date the first stirrings of Opera in Germany — Charles the Ninth of France had lent his royal ear to the "requeste en notre privé conseil, présentée par nos chers et bien amez Jean Antoine de Baïf et Joachim Thibaut de Courville, contenant que depuis trois ans en ça, ils avoyent avec grand étude et labeur assiduel, unanimement travaillé, pour l' avancement du langage Français, à remettre sus tant la façon de la poésie que la mesure et le reglement de la musique anciennement usitée par les Grecs et les Romains, au temps que ces deux nations étaient plus florissantes." In pursuance of these meritorious objects a sort of charter was drawn up

and signed by the King, and a *réglement* * for the infant Académie appended to it. It is in pleasant accordance with my theory of French music, that the very first man by whom any thing like an operatic attempt was made in France should have been something more than a mere musician. Born a Venetian, and educated for the diplomatic career, some have even said that Jean Antoine de Baïf was for a while secretary to Charles the Ninth: — it is certain, however, that besides being the fellow-labourer of Ronsard, he attempted to imitate the genial old poet by writing verses himself.

* A passage or two from this *réglement*, for which I am indebted to "La Gazette Musicale," are curious.

"Nul auditeur ni touchera, ne passera, la barrière de la niche, ne autre que ceux de la musique, ne entrera, ne maniera aucun livre ou instrument, mais se contenant au dehors de la niche, choyera tout ce qu'il verra estre pour la service ou honneur de l'Académie, tant au lieu qu' *aux personnes* d'icelle."

La niche, it is almost needless to remark, was the ancestor of the modern orchestra.

'S'il y avait querelle entre aucuns de ceux de l'Académie tant musiciens qu'auditeurs, ne s'entremanderont rien, *ne de paroles ne de fait vont pas près de la maison ou elle se tiendra*."

In fact, the original conditions of Opera were in every country as much literary as musical. Verbal rhythm was perfected long before Melody had got much further than the chants of the Church; and the *rondeau*, and the *letrilla*, and the *canzone*, had taken a form in the poet's brain, before his brother artist had found that the tones and harmonies of Nature were susceptible of a new grace and charm by being grouped in settled forms, and repeated in regular order. In the Troubadour's lay the words were to excite the largest share of interest. It was not enough that his subjects were the "audaci impresi" of chivalry: he was required to garnish the song with *concetti* and similes, to indulge in the luxuries of cadence and alliteration; while the musician, as helpless and inexperienced in his craft as a child lisping sentences, was fain to subject himself to his elder and better-taught companion. The episode of Ugolino had been perfected by Dante in his "Divina Commedia;" the combat of Tancred and Clorinda had been thrown into a polished and resonant rhythm by Tasso; long ere it occurred to Galileo to set the first, or Montaverde to apply his newly-made discoveries

to the latter — these chanted narratives being the far-off precursors of Opera. While, however, the poet stood still in his art, the musician was gaining new powers every day. The resources of counterpoint were soon employed to arrange and systematise for vocal use the *bourrée* and the *villanella*, and the other dances in which all national music has, at first, asserted its possession of form. Every day some new improvement was made in, or some new instrument added to, the ancient portative organ, or shrill and semi-barbarous lute; so that even as early as the production of the "Dafne" of Rinuccini, the new art was strong enough to contend for a more equal share of popular favour; and the poet, in place of controlling the musician, became gradually compelled to content himself to divide honours. Flowing sounds found a welcome for their own sakes, as well as dainty fantasies; and the enchantments of the voice and the finger were owned to be as essential to the newly created lyric drama as an exciting fable or a skilfully maintained dialogue.

It is needless to point to the sequel of these

advances in the art of Music, and to its general influence upon the form and poetical merit of Opera. The Italians, by the developement of a natural organisation for melody — the Germans, by their instrumental and harmonic discoveries, made, severally, acquisitions too rich and precious to be renounced; the display of which was presently deemed important enough to set aside those statutes of dramatic composition which demand fable, character, dialogue, as well as captivating forms of presentment, or magnificent accessories. It was not altogether so with the French, who are more liberally endowed, as a nation, with keen intelligence than that instinct for The Beautiful which speaks spontaneously in Italian melody — richer in buoyancy of animal spirits than that sedate and spiritual contemplativeness which finds utterance in German harmony. The peculiar nature of their language was rather an excuse than a cause, why vocal science should so long thrive meagrely among them; the dazzling brilliancy of their society, a reason why all those discoveries in Art, which being evolved by me-

ditation can but be rightly appreciated by the meditative, should be more lightly esteemed than those immediate and superficial graces that catch the eye and pique the ear. Thus, at the same time, their music, because unvocal, could not escape dryness in its serious portions, while its sprightlier part was crossed by a vein of levity, which, at this more enlightened day, is neither exhausted nor held in small esteem.

For its own special and separate progress, then, dramatic music had but a poor chance during its early days in France; but its social position was such, as to entice it into a close intimacy with the other arts which are essential to its being. As the King and the nobles of the court condescended to dance in the first representations of the new-made establishment, a clause was expressly introduced into the document, which Louis Quatorze may be seen signing on yonder curtain, to declare that "tous gentilshommes, demoiselles, et autres personnes pussent chanter aux dits opera, sansque pour cela ils dérogeassent au titre de noblesse, ni à leurs priviléges." A marquis (de Sourdeac) set

his noble wits to work to contrive the machinery for a spectacle, "La Toison d'Or," for which the great Pierre Corneille had composed the story. The master of these revels, again, though a fierce and brutal man to the Colasses and La Maupins whom he had under his authority, was a fine courtier to Le Grand Monarque.* It was as much his wit as his playing that raised Lulli from the *casserolles* of Mademoiselle de Montpensier's kitchen to the head of the four-and-twenty violins of the King. And in what a circle,—and for what a circle of wit and graceful intelligence

* Louis Quatorze was a magnificent patron of other musicians besides Lulli. Baptiste Lalande, the superintendent of his music, enjoyed the royal bounty and confidence in a large degree; and, perhaps, there are few anecdotes more closely illustrative of the "purple and gold" in which that King *par excellence*, clothed even his consolations, than the words addressed by him to Lalande, on the occasion of the latter losing his two daughters, who, after having distinguished themselves by their musical acquirements, died of the small-pox at a very early age. Some days after this sad event their father appeared at court. He dared not approach the King, but the latter called him to him. "You have lost," said he, "two daughters who had great talents: *I have lost Monseigneur.*" Then he added, pointing upwards, "Lalande, we must submit!"

did Lulli labour! We shall find him now associated with Molière in that Watteau-like court pastoral, "La Princesse d'Elide," — now by his dramatic vigour in "Cadmus" (to quote Madame de Sévigné) — throwing into alarms the gentle and delicate spirit of the authoress of the "Princess of Cleves," — now enchanting her healthier and more cheerful biographer (the life of Madame de la Fayette is contained in the Sévigné letters) by the deliciously appropriate music given to sleep in his "Atys," the slumberous charm of which remains even to this day; — finally, after having proved himself a *philosophe* by his trickery of the priests, when on his sick bed, dying the possessor of a large fortune, the produce of royal bounty. If there be any coherent and significant meaning in the sum of these scattered traits, not only was Opera immediately sheltered under the ægis of court favour, it flourished also under the favouring care of the Intelligence of France. It was not as, during its early days in England, caressed into a sickly exuberance by fools of quality — at worst, satirized and flouted as an

unmanly and irrational raree-show.* Its honourable position in part imposed upon it the forms it took. As a court pageant, magnificent decorations were necessary to it; as an object of interest to the wits of the day, care was to be

* The ridiculous and undistinguishing ecstasies of the great world to which Italian Opera was the victim when first introduced into England, were hardly less fatal to Art than the wholesale contempt lavished upon music by the wits and essayists who ruled opinion between the times of Purcell and Burney,— the elegant scholarship and social popularity of the latter doing much for the redemption of his art in public esteem. The Opera was an unfailing object of hatred and mark of sarcasm for our playwrights. One of the few smart things to be found in Fielding's dull and indecent comedies—the grand burlesque of "Tom Thumb" always excepted — is Gaywit's hit at Mr. Crambo's new opera, "The Humours of Bedlam.' "I have read it," says Lord Richly, "and it is a most surprising fine performance. It has not one syllable of sense in it from the first page to the last.

"*Mr. G.* — It must certainly take.

"*Lord R.* — Sir, it shall take, if I have interest enough to support it. I hate your dull writers of the late reigns. The design of a play is to make you laugh; and who can laugh at sense?

"*Mr. G.* — I think, my lord, we have improved on the Italians. They wanted only sense: we have neither sense nor music."

The Modern Husband, Act II. Sc. 5.

exercised in the choice of its subjects; probability to be required in their conduct: strange care! — strange probability! — when the classicism of the times, satisfied if Olympus and Parnassus were dealt with, was not shocked to encounter Juno in a hoop, Vulcan in a powdered wig, and Mercury in pearl-coloured satin breeches, his caduceus daintily garlanded with roses.

The same protection of court favour and literary sympathy did not forsake the Opera even in the corrupt days of Louis Quinze. Beyond such pleasure as was to be found in a casual hearing of Farinelli, he cared as little for music as our first King George cared for "*b*oetry or *b*ainting;" but there were others to relieve him from the burden of patronage. We shall find in one quarter a cabal, organised in the gilt chambers of a royal favourite, to protect the "Titan et Aurore" of Mondonville; —in another a Voltaire ceasing from his dishonourable courtiership to the "sincère et tendre Pompadour," and laying by his more honest and bitter indignation against "*l'inf*—"

not only to "cracher des vers" for occasional festivals, but also to elaborate opera books for Rameau*, or to consult that famous composer with most flattering deference concerning the "Clavecin Oculaire" of the Père Castel.†

* Voltaire's musical dramas were "Samson" (in five acts), set to music by Rameau, but owing, its author tells us, to some cabal, never represented; "Tanis et Zelide, ou Les Rois Pasteurs," a tragedy for music (in five acts); "Pandore" (in five acts); "La Temple de la Gloire" (in five acts), a *pièce d'occasion;* "Le Baron d'Otrante" (in three acts); a comic opera; and "Les Deux Tonneaux," a sketch for a comic opera, also in three acts.

† This invention seems to have excited considerable inquiry at the time of its being put forth; and the following passage concerning it, besides its intrinsic curiosity, and illustrating the interest which French literary men have taken in Music, has a pertinence and a value in this place, as a testimony to the fondness of a French musician for philosophic and fanciful speculations. "Father Castel the Jesuit," says Gretry, in his delightful Essais sur la Musique, "invented a harpsichord which displayed colours instead of yielding sounds. Was this composed of many octaves? was black the deepest, and white the highest tone, with the other colours placed in the interval? I am ignorant of the fact. It seems to me, rather, that he ought to represent the body of sound and its component parts by the colours of the prism, or of the rainbow, and then, by combinations of the primitive

Again, when the representations of the Italian troop had taught the French to encourage a taste

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tints, compose the rest of the octave. The first octave being settled, the more acute ones could only be a repetition of the same, of paler shade, in proportion to their remoteness from their original * * *

"By the analogy which exists among all natural phenomena, the musician who is well organised recognises all the colours in the harmony of sounds. The grave and flat sounds produce on his ear the same effect which brown and sober colours produce on his eyes; on the other hand, the sharp, or *dieses*, have the effect of bright and decided colours. Between these two extremes are discovered all the colours which exist in Music, the same as in Painting, fit for the delineation of different passions and different characters.

"The different passions are marked upon the countenance by different colours. Black and violet indicate fury and rage; a purple red denotes anger; a tender red modesty; and white expresses innocence: or, to make use of vulgar terms, absence of colour stands for clearness from all vice; yellow, again, is engendered by vexation often repeated, &c. &c. I doubt not but the mixture of these different passions and characters produces, even in the appearance of man, all the shades of different colours; or, — not to mistake effects for causes, but that every man differently organised bears on himself the seal of his passions, and displays the colours which designate them. Remark how naturally each person of a drama assumes in his dress the colours which are proper

for melody unaccompanied by dancing — for the tones and not the words of the singer — who that knows the history of Paris in the last century can have forgotten how largely both the noble patronage and the wit of that brilliant capital arrayed themselves in the Gluck and Piccini quarrel, to defend their stage against its being utterly yielded to the syrenry of the South? Few other chapters in the history of Art record so lavish an expenditure of talent and intrigue. Remark, too, not only the substantial worth of the central subject of the controversy, but the direction taken by his invention. Though the composer of "Iphigenie" was a hundred years beyond Rameau in resource, in poetry of conception, in grace of genius, his triumphs tended to remodel,—not to destroy French opera. His works are more antagonistic to the "Artaserse" of Hasse than to "Les Indes Galantes" of

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to him. Does he not seem to point out to the musician the tones, the sounds, which he ought to employ? All these things are not inevitable, or according to rule; but the truth commands the artist to observe them; and he who labours from inspiration will not depart from them without reason."

Quinault's associate. A study of them will show that it was not poverty but will which prevented him from meeting the Italians on their own ground of melody, while he directed all his stores of thought and learning to give dramatic pomp to the choral dances and processions in which the French took so much delight, — and to satisfy the national taste for propriety in declamation. There is as much significance in the selection of Paris by this Michael Angelo of music for the theatre of his experiments, as in the violence with which these were canvassed by the best thinkers of their day, or as in the royal auspices under which they were carried on. The institution thus honoured surely could not have deserved the neglect it has met with from musicians, or writers upon art.

Till the last revolution the Grand Opera has never been cast off by government, which even now, though giving little other direct countenance, withholds not its pecuniary support. The dark period which impended at the year 1790 began with an attempt of the Conseil Municipal to possess itself of this national establish-

ment — a solemn protest against which pretension, with its Sybilline burden, "*The Opera is destroyed*, if it passes out of royal keeping!" is to be seen in the archives of the Hotel de Ville even unto this day. Nay, in the times of confusion and discord that so shortly followed, which brought Marie Antoinette, the patroness of Gluck, to the block, L'Académie, now stripped of its "*Royale*" and called "Le Théatre des Arts," remained still an object of official superintendence. "Nothing could be more grotesque and amusing," says an agreeable writer in La Gazette Musicale, "than to hear Beauprè, a dancer of that epoch, relate in his own graphic way the transactions of the artists with General Henriot; — who, in spite of his avowed protection of Le Théatre des Arts would threaten Laine and the other actors to cut off their heads within four-and-twenty hours, when they did not sing the patriotic hymn in vogue with sufficient earnestness, good-will, and enthusiasm." In the year V of the Republic, the Directory will be found taking more rational measures for the re-organisation of the Opera

under the auspices of Ginguéné, then director of public instruction. At his instance, among the members of the committee of musical administration will be found a literary man and wit, charged with the interests of the authors. This was the brilliant but profligate Parny. And — besides the more general attention which Buonaparte found leisure to extend to the musical affairs of his nation; now commanding the publication of Haydn's quartetts; now opposing the exorbitant demands of Elleviou the singer, when an engagement at L'Opera Comique was in question; now, while he gave all but unlimited powers to Lesueur, from an unworthy pique opposing himself to Cherubini's appointment to any office of notoriety or trust, — the Emperor especially befriended the Opera by bestowing his favouring countenance upon the best composer and the best work that had been seen and heard there since Gluck's time: — the composer, Spontini; the work, "La Vestale." The Restoration restored L'Académie to its royalty again; but the court had then become a power-

less assembly of faded phantoms, and the wits and thinkers had graver interests to take care of than those of the *coulisses;* so that the Opera succumbed under the paralysis that infected all establishments during that stagnant and melancholy epoch.

Is it then remarkable that, with such a past, the lyrical drama of France should reflect the history and opinions of its times? — that the trivialities of gay court-life should have found a representation in the grand ballets which were so long an essential part of every work? — that the severity of a literary parterre in a musical theatre should have demanded coherence and climax in the fable to be represented, and dramatic as well as vocal powers on the part of the actor? Is it to be wondered at, that since the peculiar organisation of the natural man, and the exigences of his language, made the singer the least excellent ingredient in the Opera of France, those also who wrought for it should be led to study combination rather than melody, declamation rather than facility of display? Is it needful to detail, point by point,

how a new revolution and a Rossini were required to sweep all these deeply-graven characteristics away — traces of their existence being still so distinctly evident, that he who studies the modern, cannot forbear to take into account also the ancient Opera of Paris? Enough; there is the mysterious tinkle of the prompter's bell; no more time for anecdote or speculation. *Enter* the trombones; we must listen to "Robert le Diable."

CHAP. III.

THE "MYSTERY" OF YOUNG FRANCE — "ROBERT LE DIABLE."

Meyerbeer's Operas essentially typical of Young France. — English Misapprehension. — Mr. Hogarth's Character of "Robert." — "Robert" a Mystery. — Tendency towards Mysticism in modern French Imagination. — The Church and the Opera. — M. Véron's allegorical Scenery. — French Mysticism sensual, not spiritual. — Its Expression in Meyerbeer's Music. — Peculiarity of Style. — Originality orchestral rather than vocal. — Meyerbeer an Elaborator. — Eloquent Defence of Elaboration by George Sand. — *Robert*, a Figure new to French Opera, — His Chivalry, — His Courtesy. — Nourrit the best *Robert*. — Nourrit as a Singer. — The Retirement of Singers. — Nourrit as a Man, — Anecdotes of his last Days. — A Conversation with M. Berlioz — His Suicide. — *Alice*, an original Creation. — The Music of her Part. — *Bertram*. — Mixture of Levity with French Mysticism. — Infernal Ballets. — Rumoured Duel between M. Janin and the Comte Walewski. — The Laffarge Trial. — The Consistency of the whole Tissue. — Levity a Hindrance in Art.

If the premises of my slight prelude be granted, they will amount to a pleading for the publication of thoughts and fancies connected with

Meyerbeer's opera too intimately in my mind to be expunged from an honest journal. They will prepare the reader for the assertion, that — time, place, and manner of presentment considered, — the "Robert" is to be accepted not only as an illustration of French art, but as a type of French opinion; whence my crotchets concerning it necessarily take a twofold direction. I can listen to a barrel-organ droning out the never-too-old melodies of "Tancredi" or "Il Barbière;" I can content myself with studying, for their own intrinsic dramatic force or melodic sweetness, the "Fidelio" or the "Euryanthe" of Weber, even when cut down to the meagre shadow of a piano-forte arrangement; but I must see Meyerbeer's operas as well as hear them, and at L'Académie Royale: and all arrangements and transcripts of them have but a value, in proportion as Fancy is pliant, and willing to call up all the pride, pomp, and circumstance which belong to their representation in Paris. There are only about three separate pieces — Isabelle's two *cavatinas* in "Robert" and the couplets of the Page in

"Les Huguenots," which are eligible or effective in a concert-room. Thus, to those who are not familiar with these works in their birthplace there is danger of seeming extravagant, perhaps even unintelligible, in offering some account of them; while those familiar with the music of Paris have already either accepted them as *chefs d'œuvre*, or rejected them as confused and elaborate masses of noise and pageantry. But the attempt must still be made; and if the result be only to quicken curiosity and invite a keener analysis, something is done. They have as yet been too cavalierly treated by the English fraternity of critics. In his agreeable "Memoirs of the Musical Drama," for instance, my good friend Mr. Hogarth passes over the "Robert" in half a dozen lines, giving the drama the praise of considerable "poetical merit, with allowance for the wildness and extravagance of the subject."

Now, under submission, such a "character in little" as this is at once too slight and too scornful. To begin with the "Robert:" that opera has surely a specific interest as the most

striking, if not the first specimen of the operatic "Mystery" produced on the French stage. As an utterance, it is no less remarkable after its kind than the novels of Victor Hugo, or the Göthe worship of Young France, or the naturalisation of those inconsistently-consistent phantasms, the tales of Hoffmann. Low as its text — or the text of any opera-book — stands on the scale of works of intelligence, it is nevertheless, though an illegitimate, a far-away descendant of "Faust." It is animated by a breath of the same spirit as convulses the "Spiridion" and "Les Sept Chords de la Lyre" of George Sand, and as expresses itself in the noble but mystical personations of the "Ahasuerus," and "Prometheus" by Edgar Quinet. "Je n'ignore pas, madame," says M. Lerminier in one of his controversial letters to the authoress of "Lelia," "qu'il est de mode aujourd'hui de mettre dans tout un peu de christianité." Nay, it was but the other day that those curious as to the fate of Donizetti's last opera at L'Académie found in the smart and florid *feuilleton* of the hour the same truth illustrated, and more directly, as regards

my subject. "Depuis quelque temps," says the anonymous writer, "l'opéra entretient, dans ses œuvres lyriques, d'étroites rélations avec l'église. Les derniers ouvrages représentés sur cette scène ont tous emprunté quelque chose, les uns le sujet tout entier, les autres quelques détails importans aux passions et aux cérémonies religieuses."

It may be well that it is easier for the English to sneer at than to sympathise with these imperfect and alloyed and distorted shadowings forth of belief — with these struggles of Art to find some central rallying-point in place of a void: but there is a mind and a meaning in them, nevertheless, which no observer of the progress of opinion in France ought to disdain. And this tendency, if not fully comprehended, was instinctively met by the exquisite managerial tact of M. Véron * while putting the "Mystery"

* On the other hand, so completely did M. Véron regard the production of "Robert" as hazardous, that, after the opera had been kept back for nearly two years, he insisted upon the government giving him an indemnity of 50,000 francs for the obligation he was under to produce the work which M. le Vicomte de Rochefoucauld had bespoken before he entered on the lesseeship of L'Académie

in question on the stage: as may be seen in the decorations of the scene-painter. The audience is to be prepared for a story of Satanic influence, and accordingly the drop-curtain, which is displayed before the dark and mystic introduction to the fable begins, represents a wild scene of volcanic rocks, in the midst of which, from a chasm, a demon-shape is seen winging its flight upwards to earth. Thus, again, before the commencement of the last act, that none may escape from the consummation of the legend — the conquest of Evil by Good — another significant decoration exhibits the figure of a white-robed and white-winged angel floating downwards from Heaven, to announce peace and forgiveness.

But if the "Robert" has a certain mystical character, it is sensually rather than spiritually wrought out; in this respect, following the law of the recent French imaginative creations. Authors, composers, nay, scene painters and pageant makers — for these all work in harmony to produce a French opera — have made it their aim to address the imagination by the most gross and tangible appeals to ear and eye

possible. Though the mind is to follow the conflict of Heaven and Hell for a human soul, the gay or appalling melodrama in which the momentous story is conducted, is accompanied by melodies, rhymed, and coloured, and decked out with all the conventional attractions of the sensual school. The *valse* of the demons, but for a few mechanical tricks, might be a dancing measure of Transylvanian miners — the prayers of the pilgrim maiden, by whose agency the dark doom is to be averted, and the fiend cheated of his prey, are intrinsically little graver than the songs of the Rose or Lucette of the old Opéra Comique, whose most momentous cases reached the wreath and *bouquet* she was to wear at the coming *Rosiere.* There is one moment, and one only, it seems to me, where the composer has in his *prima intenzione* reached the spiritual height of his subject, — I mean the point in the last act, where the holy chanting within the cathedral supported by the swelling tones of the organ wrings the heart of the prodigal with a strange trouble, and forces from him the agonised and

almost despairing exclamation, " Si je pouvais prier ! " — a drop of pure heart's blood offered on the steps of the altar. Elsewhere the musical idea of the drama, however wrought up to a climax by the aids of a most artfully contrived instrumentation, is conventional — a thing of mode and school rather than of Nature. Another race will come who may not relish the measures, and the flourishes, and the harmonic piquancies, which are now accepted instead of musical substantialities, and seeking for the indwelling and lasting thought, will find it no where. It is not so with the lyrical dramas of Gluck ; it will not be so with the one opera of Beethoven, or with the " Don Giovanni " and the " Figaro" of Mozart; it ought not to be so with the third act of " Otello." But though it be impossible, in right of the " Robert," to rank Meyerbeer among the Dantes or Shakspeares of his art, his music has still a charm and a completeness of its own, which give it a peculiar place among works of modern creation. That it is mixed in style—partly Italian and partly German — there is no denying ; it is not

so fluently captivating in melody as if it were purely the former, not so severe in its rejection of outward forms of captivation as if it were the latter. In the *rococo* decorations of the best age, there is a like intermixture and a like harmony. The religious cherubs — the chivalric griffins of the Christian North, are interlaced by the acanthus leaves, and the husk garlands, and the volutes of the Pagan South. But a spirit, neither Christian nor Pagan, has passed over these fragments, separately so discordant; and by here shedding a tinge of colour, there throwing off a winding hair line or winging the cherub's head with the acanthus leaf, — has made up a whole which, however corrupt when tried by the standards of the highest Truth and Beauty, has still its own proportions and laws, and fascinates, even while it defies rigorous criticism. If I chose, or it was needed, to urge a sophistry in the cause of the "Robert," I might add that such an union of styles and climates, of North and South, was not only permissible but laudable in a story, the scene of which is laid in Sicily, — a land at once rich in Norman remains and Corinthian columns. But, as Sir Thomas

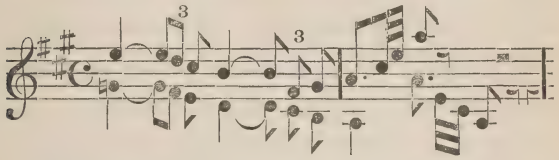
Browne says to those "who have held that snow is black, that the earth moves, that the soul is air, fire, water — this is all philosophy." Neither will such special pleading persuade the rigidly scientific, or the exclusively sentimental, into any sympathy with the splendours or shallownesses of Meyerbeer's music.

But, if manner be thus all-predominant; in the works of no other composer with whom I am acquainted does it play such a distinguished part. For Meyerbeer, be it insisted, aspires not merely to express situations, but to paint characters in music; and, being poor in the original possession of a vein of dramatic melody, produces his effects rather by the clothing of his thoughts than by the thoughts themselves — by their orchestral dress and not their intrinsic significance. He has felt, like all who reflect deeply on his art, that its powers in such delineation are at once vague and limited; but, instead of such a conclusion enforcing upon him keen and self-questioning research, the result seems a total indifference whether his themes in themselves warrantably express the knightly prodigality of Robert, or the

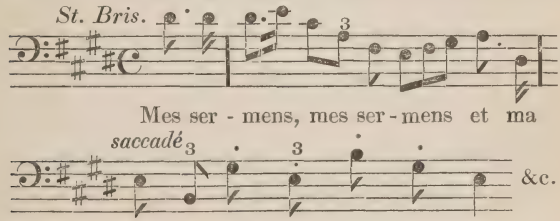
holy innocence of Alice, or the demoniac darkness of Bertram. He contents himself with "pointing the moral" of his phrases by such orchestral touches and combinations as shall have some harmony with the lurid shades of the scene-painter, — with the supernatural flames of the property-man, — with the tournament processions of *le maître de ballet*. It is curious to observe on what utterly commonplace tunes he does not disdain sometimes to lavish all his artifices; witness the quartett of heralds "Sonnez, clairons," in the second act of "Robert;" witness, even, the subject, "Dieu puissant," which is the master-idea of its magnificent final trio. Nothing can be much more thoroughly hackneyed than these. In all places where the scene relies rather upon the thought and the singer than upon the dramatic position, orchestrally expressed, this commonplace reveals itself in a most painful degree: — witness the first duet between Robert and Isabelle, "Avec bonté," now left out, — witness the *stretto* of their duet in the great scene, "Crains ma fureur," where, in spite of a most careful piquancy of instrumentation, and

a certain trick * to give emphasis and an air of novelty, the listener cannot but feel that he is

* The artifice to which I allude is Meyerbeer's propensity to enfeeble the terminations to his phrases, by making the vocal part *echo itself*, or, in other words, fill up the pause, and sing the reply succeeding its natural close, which is usually given to the orchestra. Thus, in the last movement of the duet "Avec bonté," we have the following "lame and impotent conclusion:"—



A thousand other examples of this peculiarity will suggest themselves to every one familiar with Meyerbeer's operas, — the composer having even employed it in that *chef-d'œuvre* of modern dramatic effect, the conspiracy scene in "Les Huguenots:" thus—



It is difficult to conceive on what other principle of expression in composition save the puerile resolution to be original at any price whatsoever, a figure so repulsive,

carried on by his own enthusiasm, and by the gestures of the actors, — not by the musical climax, — towards that point of strong suspense and passion so effectively filled by the well-known burst of entreaty "Robert, toi que j'aime!"

These mannerisms are all more or less the strivings of aspiration unaccompanied by commensurate power. It seems, indeed, as if Meyerbeer must undergo the throes of a long-protracted labour to produce his great works. If the anecdotage current on the subject is to be believed, the slowness with which he creates is only equalled by that of our own poet, of whom it is told, that a friend calling upon him found the street laid with straw, and the knocker tied up in the kid glove, Q—— having that morning been "safely delivered of a couplet!" I do not believe in the nursery tales of a servant being stationed in the antechamber, while Meyerbeer is at work, to prevent any sounds which may proceed from his musical laboratory straying abroad into the streets; but certain it is, that the changes and additions made to the score of

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because so redundantly and feebly unnatural, can have been affected.

"Les Huguenots" while it was in rehearsal, were so important and harassing, that, somewhere about the sixtieth trial, the entire *corps* of players and singers rose in mutiny against the master, and demanded that he should cease from his experiments. There is a sedulous resolution in all this to produce a great and permanent work, worthy of all respect; but such watchings, and siftings, and trials, and erasures are not necessary to — I dare almost add not endurable by Genius of the highest order. They must have gone on silently and severely in the mind, where the work of study, and purification, and selection, though unowned and unfelt, no more ceases than the operations of that central fire which, far beneath the surface, perfects metallic riches in the earth and verdure upon it: but the hand ought assuredly not to be thus restrained and vacillating. It was not thus that Handel wrote his oratorios. And who has forgotten the well-known anecdote, how Rossini, that idlest and least artistic of all boon companions, by ten minutes' work with his pen, in half-playful mockery of the poet Tottola, saved the second act of his

"Mose" from damnation by throwing off that magnificent Preghiera?—an anticipation, at least, of the most highly-wrought effects so elaborately calculated and wrought up by the composer of "Robert." *

* I cannot resist risking the utter destruction of my own text by adding in a note a passage stating the other side of the question, from George Sand's eloquent letter to Meyerbeer, upon which I have fallen since transcribing the above page. "Were I even an enlightened *dilettante*," says the writer, "I would not dissect your *chefs-d'œuvre* to try to discover in them some slight blemish which would give me an opportunity of displaying the puerilities of my scientific knowledge. I should not know how to find whether your inspiration was of the head or the heart — a strange distinction signifying absolutely nothing; a reproach eternally brought by criticism against artists, as if the same blood did not throb in the bosom and in the brow; as if, according to the supposition that there are two distinct shrines in men for the reception of the sacred flame, the fire which mounts from the secret heart to the brain, and that which descends from the brain to the secret heart, did not produce in Art and in Poetry precisely the same effects! If any one were to say that you were of a nervously bilious temperament, and that your labour proceeds slowly, with less rapidity, perhaps, but with more perfection than in persons more sanguine and full of life, I should understand what he meant, and think it the simplest thing in the world that you had not all the

But to every man his due; and, while in natural freshness and spontaneity, or in a knowledge of those deepest principles of art which made Gluck immortal, Meyerbeer must be

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temperaments at once: but what matters it if there is a goblet of diamond-clear water on your piano in place of a flask of burning Cyprus wine — if the one enkindle in you that which the other does not enkindle in its possessor? What pedantic frenzy torments these poor literary censors, that they should be for ever employed in mistrusting their sympathies, and asking of themselves whether there is no chance that the Venus of Milo may have been made with the left in place of the right hand? The sight of all the harm which men of talent do themselves in these essays to penetrate the mysteries of the workshop, and to surprise from the artist the secret of his vigils and reveries, is a grievous thing: it is melancholy to see a family of intelligences, without doubt fruitful, impoverish itself, and destroy its own fertility with all its might, under the idea of reaching that which is called clear-sightedness and impartiality."—*Lettres d'un Voyageur.*

It would ill become me, had I weapons keen enough, to enter the lists in defence of my own fantasies: I can only hope that all who read this brilliant and ingenious passage will extend its sympathies a circle beyond their original limit — to the critic as well as to the artist. If there be an inspiration, why not also an appreciation of the head as well as of the heart? — and why may not both be valuable?

owned deficient, he has given to the French stage in "Robert" three figures, as clearly in costume, colour, and demeanour, belonging to the days of Romance, as if they bordered some missal or *Cronique* of the Middle Ages. Robert is the prince of chevaliers from the first to the last note of his part — a prince in his libertinism, yet in not one of his lineaments wearing a family likeness to the libertine king, Don Juan. There is a courtesy, an elegance, a gallantry in all his appearances,—whether when he sings the "Sicilienne" among the gamesters — or when upon being taxed by his tempter with cowardice, he bursts out into that brilliant "*explosion*" (I borrow the French word)

> "Des chevaliers de ma patrie
> L'honneur toujours fut le soutien."

— or when slowly pacing the ruined cloisters of St. Rosalie on his sacrilegious errand, he re-assures himself on seeing the mystic branch, with the hopes of

> ". . . . la puissance et l'immortalité."

Unlike the gorgeous prodigal of Spain — though like him in his boldness — he is a loyal

gentleman towards women. Though he breaks in like a lion upon Isabella, who is laid asleep by the charm to gain which he has dared so much, there is a tenderness in his short contemplative soliloquy, "Qu'elle est belle," which anticipates the triumph of her tears and entreaties for mercy. It is a like loyalty, which makes him cling to the Tempter, even when the latter, agonised by the terror of losing his prey, reveals the dread secret of his parentage. He is under influence, but still not altogether weak: there is a manliness in all his deeds of good or evil, which we needs must love; and this in all its manifold gradations, from reckless gaiety to reckless despair, Meyerbeer has so traced, that no singer can possibly attempt the part, with whom a manner bold, as well as brilliant, is not in some measure a characteristic. Perhaps my meaning will be clearer to those who are not familiar with the opera, by saying that, with all his consummate vocal skill, even were he cured of his nonchalance and deficiency as an actor, the part of Robert would be, musically, an utter failure in the mouth of Rubini.

The full brilliancy of this character has never been thoroughly brought out, save by him who created it (to use the French phrase) — I do not say its full manliness — for the very elegance so highly prized and loudly regretted in poor Adolphe Nourrit by a portion of the Parisian *cognoscenti*, bordered so closely upon a mannered over-grace and over-sweetness, that I never heard that fine singer, and never saw that elegant and careful actor, without feeling that neither his clear and metallic voice — nasal in its falsetto — nor his graceful postures, belonged to the greatest school of art. There was a smile when he threw his head back to sing, or to launch a *mot* at some one behind him — a mincing elongation of his "*Oui*"—s and "*Patrié*"—s and the other sounds, which sung in French are intrinsically offensive, that annoyed my insular eyes and ears, as imparting to grace and sentiment and emphasis a touch of *make-believe*, destructive of their effect. He appears on recollection to have been more conscious of his handsome person, and high voice, and

artistic accomplishments, than any one I have ever seen on the French stage — to have attitudinized more premeditatedly—to have declaimed with more of that conventional exactness, which, as English ears unhappily know, can become so utterly intolerable, — than the generality of his brethren: the old Roman gentlemen with their lean throats and their nonpareil toupets at the *Théâtre Français* always excepted. And yet when I think of the joyous and sparkling vivacity with which he threw off the song,

" L'or est un chimère,"—

of the enthusiasm he put forth in the chivalresque duet with Bertram, I am half tempted to draw my pen through any qualification of merits so honourable as his, because so largely owing to pride in his art and research into its legitimate effects. When I heard Nourrit, too, his best days had long passed: it was a very few months before his departure — the fame of his rival cast its shadow before; he looked feverish and anxious, and as if he devoured the plaudits with a jealous ear, which could detect whether

one hand less was raised than had acknowledged his triumphs the night before. But while the public was listening to him, it was already busily talking of Duprez!

I have often thought that the conditions of decay and change fall upon none so cruelly as on the singer. His powers are more evanescent and short-lived than those of the tragedian or comic actor: an unlucky journey, an open window, or a fit of too sedulous practice, may extinguish them in the very midst of his career. Nor does Fashion show greater mobility any where than in music:—who can be sure that the style which pleased ten years since will suffice to please to-day? I have seen Pasta — now all but an extinct star, though some fifteen years younger than Mars or the Siddons of Germany, Madame Schröder — at the close of a superb performance of Medea, throughout which her voice refused to second her, weeping bitter tears of vexation, as she exclaimed, "Is it not terrible to possess all the energy I ever had, and yet not be able to sing?" I shall never forget an evening passed by the side of an artiste,

scarcely five-and-twenty, whom the sudden loss of voice had degraded from a high position upon the Italian stage to the minor theatres of a provincial town; from laurel crowns at Milan, to hisses at ——. I shall never forget the impression made by the wretchedness of her young face which Nature had meant should be gracious and sprightly; and by the corroding tones of her voice, as she spoke of past and present days — careless who listened — with a desperate indifference. But I can imagine Nourrit's sensations during his last weeks in Paris to have been even more acute than these. Besides the natural pride of an artist, he possessed in its fullest extent the *bravoure* — no English word will express it — of a Frenchman. His glory had been won, in stirring times for both characters. But fourteen years had elapsed since his first appearance in Gluck's "Iphigenie," when his singing in the delicious part of Pylade at once made him a favourite with the public; — eleven years only since his success in "Les Deux Salems" had been so brilliant, as, according to some biographers, to drive from

the stage his own father, — the son's true progenitor in impatience of rivalry! But how much for French art, how much for French history, had been comprehended within those eleven years! A revolution in Opera, a revolution in the kingdom. The cumbrous splendours of Sacchini and Lesueur and Spontini had been swept from the stage by Auber's sprightly and exciting airs, by Rossini's captivating melodies, and Meyerbeer's magnificent but still vocal combinations, — all requiring far other executive powers on the part of the interpreters than the old *urli Francesi*, which made the lyric drama of Paris so long, though so unjustly, intolerable. The delicious flute-like volubility of Mesdames Cinti and Dorus-Gras, the dignity and passion of the ill-fated Mademoiselle Falcon, were demanded, in place of "the shrill screams of Madame Branchu," which so shocked the fine ears of the Fudge family by the fine series of works produced in rapid succession, — to which Nourrit as principal tenor, and one capable of acting as well as of singing finely, was the most important support. It was

he who created the leading parts in "Le Siege de Corinthe," in "Robert le Diable," in "Les Huguenots," in "Le Comte Ory," in "Guillaume Tell," and in "La Juive,"—and created them, too, dramatically as well as vocally. To quote an eloquent writer in "La Revue des Deux Mondes," "he marked the transition from the old recitative of the French to the *cavatina* of the Italians, from Lainé to Rubini: and yet he was so far national, that, whereas the singers of the South are far too apt to sacrifice unity of character to one particular moment, or favourite note, he carried his activity and care into the minutest details of his part, and, from his first entrance to his final exit, never ceased to *be* the person he represented." Costume, attitude, by-play, nothing was neglected by Nourrit. Hence he might well be the darling of a people to whom mere musical emotions will not compensate for want of interest in the drama, want of tact in the actors, want of taste in the *mise en scene;* hence he might well be endowed with an importance and authority in the council of the superb establishment which his performance so

eminently sustained. Nor was Nourrit's share in the revolutions of Paris bounded within the walls of L'Academie Royale. It was he who went from theatre to theatre, after the Three Glorious Days, singing "La Parisienne," in answer to the enthusiasm of the people at their deliverance from the Bourbons. — Where is the singer, or the enthusiasm, now? — It was he who, meeting the movement of national taste in his own art, naturalised the youngest of those great German composers, to whom France was beginning to open her ears, by bringing forward the songs of Schubert. And his interests were not confined to music only, says his panegyrist, to whom I am already indebted; "he might be seen eagerly grappling with every new idea. Le Maistre, George Sand, and De Lamennais in turns took possession of his mind: he passed in one moment from St. Simon to Spinosa, intoxicating himself with philosophy, as if it were wine or opium." M. Berlioz tells us that Nourrit's strong and visionary enthusiasm led him to project schemes of a religious theatrical reform, for the purification and elevation of

the stage. It was a touch of the mysticism of his time that allowed him to countenance that strange scheme of the Abbé Chatel, who wished to raise a joint-stock church, the creed of which should accommodate the sensual as well as the spiritual wants of his congregation; and whose fashion it was to advertise, that after the sermon "he would present a *bouquet* to every one of the ladies." Nourrit assisted at the requiem for the Poles, gone through in French, in the Bazar St. Honoré; but his assistance was given in good faith. Ill regulated as he was in his enthusiasm, he was no charlatan. He had visions of human perfectibility, he was sincerely ambitious to bear his part in advancing human progress.

We English have nothing in the musical profession analogous to such a character, or such a position. Who is there among us that would not deride the idea of an opera-singer being a significant member of society, as a pretension little less absurd than the boast of Hood's washerwoman, who declares, that "laundresses are links of creation?"— and yet such Nourrit

felt himself to be. In his art, in himself, he was as entirely and ardently Parisian as Madame de Staël herself, but still — while preferring the kennels of the Rue Lepelletier to the Chiaja of Naples —like Madame de Staël, Parisian of the best quality.

To such a man so placed, organised, moreover, by Nature with the acutest possible sensibilities, the idea of rivalry must have been intolerable torment. He could not be expected to admit, that the very revolution in which he had been bearing a part must lead to developements in Art at which he must stop short, — to requisitions from the public which there was no chance of his satisfying, — that a more graceful and rythmical and melodious school of music must superinduce the necessity of artists who should be more largely and richly singers than he, with all his dramatic care and vocal agility, had been. The fame of Duprez had grown and grown in Italy till the French began to lay hold upon it as a matter of national felicitation. He was to be invited to become glorious in his own country. For Nourrit to enter into competition

with a younger man, and thus own that his supremacy was no longer a thing unquestioned, was impossible; perhaps, too, he felt instinctively, that the wear and tear of an immense stage and a powerful orchestra for fourteen successive years had told their tale upon him. The anecdotes of the conflict and distress of mind he endured, now religiously treasured up by the Parisians as the relics of a martyr, are very painful; and, to our eyes, strange. There is one tale of his being found on the Pont des Arts by a friend, wandering carelessly to and fro, in a passion of despondency, which almost foreshowed the last desperate moment of self-destruction. Another evening, while singing his favourite part of "Masaniello," a whisper reached the *coulisses*, that Duprez was in the theatre. Nourrit was seized with a violent fit of trembling, and a total failure of his voice: the performance came to an end. Throughout this sad time he made no secret of the nature of his own feelings; he knew nothing of that proud and scornful silence, wrapped in which an Englishman would have died rather than let any "Earl Percy see his fall."

"It was the evening of his farewell performance," says M. Berlioz. "Having shut myself up with him in his room during an interlude, with the object of once more endeavouring to combat his resolution, I showed him that all artists were compelled, in the course of their career, to undergo those vicissitudes which *he* was bent on escaping at any price. I unfolded to him the endless catalogue of difficulties and troubles which every one among us is called on, at one time or other, to encounter. I recalled to his recollection the innumerable marks of affection, of esteem, and admiration which the public every day gave him, and of which, at that moment, he had just received so distinguished a proof. Nourrit wept a good deal: presently recovering his voice, and interrupting me, 'Enough, my dear friend,' he said: 'all that you say is perfectly true, generally speaking, but cannot be applied in my case. I was not born for such an existence: entering at an early age on the stage, while my father still occupied one of the first situations at the theatre, I found, thanks to a combination of circumstances, including

his kind solicitude, every door open to me — every path made smooth — every difficulty removed. My poor father dying, I remained stationed in the first rank at the opera, where I have enjoyed the easy privilege of just doing as I chose — what I chose. Now I find an altered state of circumstances; a new talent with new claims presents itself: the public is fickle, and often less than just. I should be forced, in order to maintain my position, to struggle every day — every hour: I fear that the bare idea of such a contention might paralyse my efforts. I am absolutely unequal, not merely to sustain it, but even to engage in it. I must quit the stage — I will quit it: — let us speak no farther about the matter.' "

It seems an infatuation only one step short of the final madness, that — thus bleeding at every pore — any persuasion should have induced poor Nourrit to present himself before a new and strange public, accustomed to the very excellences and gifts, the want of which was driving him from Paris. But though his banishment to Italy was self-inflicted, his ambition was not

dead. Possibly, in his less gloomy moments, he believed that his day was not yet over; that he had still energy to recompose himself anew; that he *would*, in short, have a chest voice in place of his own nasal and brilliant *falsetto di testa*, and learn that honeyed and long-drawn *cantabile* which his countrymen were beginning to prize as an indispensable treasure. Possibly he might fool himself with visions of triumphs to be won in other towns; perhaps even on some far future day in his own Paris. The rest need not be dwelt upon: his lukewarm reception at Naples, where he was no "star," no authority, by a public sufficiently diluted in taste by constant tricklings of the music of Donnizetti and Coppola, to have hissed Rossini's *chef-d'œuvre*, the "Guillaume Tell;" — his melancholy struggles to effect that which Time and Nature had rendered impossible, and to reconstruct the register of his voice, as well as his style, — and the last crowning frenzy, in which he terminated his existence, are all well known. All were too naturally consequent upon each other to excite as much wonder as they moved

pity. If the approach of Death could, as poets hold, have given him an insight into the future, he must surely have seen honours and regrets in store for him ample enough to have satisfied even the cravings of his ambition. His melancholy fate has led his countrymen into the lengths of a fond injustice; and I have heard not a few Parisians speak of Duprez in a resentful and disparaging tone, as though *he* had been the cause of the tragical catastrophe. We order matters differently in England: no changes of Time or Fashion are allowed to push our old favourites from their stools.* We will

* While correcting this very page for the press, an illustration of French forbearance towards a retiring artist appears in the journals of the day, too characteristic to be passed over. On Thursday, January the 28th, Mademoiselle Mars played her favourite part of Moliere's Celimene in "Le Misantrope." Having acted with that grace and delicacy and judgment which will never grow old, she was called forward at the end of the comedy, to receive the unmeaning homage of a shower of flowers and garlands. Among the latter — and, as it chanced, the very crown lifted from the boards by the actor who led her forward — was a black and white chaplet of *immortelles;* one of those funeral wreaths which are sold at the gates of all the French cemeteries. The force of insult could hardly

not admit that powers are impaired, or that any one belonging to a newer dynasty of Art can possess greater refinements of intelligence and practical knowledge than those that charmed us twenty years since! But of our amount of regret for dead or utterly vanished artistic greatness, it may be feared that we cannot so justly boast.

This notice of the original Robert — in himself and in his story a type of French art and French ambition — has led me away from the second of the three musical individualities in Meyerbeer's Opera; I mean the gentle Alice, who is as truly the real as Isabelle is the titular heroine of the story. And surely —

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further go; and the actress would have been justified in repeating the reproach of the indignant comedian Baron, when mocked in his old age by merely a laugh from the parterre — "Ingrat public que j'ai formé!" in place of her calm and gentle rejection of so brutal an irony. Yet, when Mademoiselle Mars is really dead to the Théâtre Français, there is hardly a journal that will not disparage every rising actress for her sake; and declare, that till a woman be fifty, she may be a puppet, but she can be no *comedienne!* — *Feb.* 12. 1841.

peculiarities of style allowed for — tenderness, delicacy, the girl's earnestness of innocent faith, and the vassal's devotion to the old house under whose shelter she has been reared, are sweetly expressed in the music of her part. With the exception of the beautiful "Va dit elle," in the first act, (Meyerbeer's finest song, for Isabelle's more popular "Grace!" is slighter*, and has more of the *couplet* in its construction,) the part of the pilgrim maiden may be said to be comprised in two scenes. The first is that before the cavern in the third act, where, after the yell of the demon orgie has been heard, rising up like a noxious metallic vapour from the bowels of the earth, her sweet ballad, "Quand j'ai quitté Normandie," comes

* In going through Meyerbeer's music the student cannot but remark how largely the composer has imbued himself with the generic taste for *refrain*, sometimes availing himself of it for the production of effects, even in his grandest and apparently most elaborate concerted pieces. In the romance — the "Grace!" alluded to — the *refrain* is repeated three times. In fact, like other of his modern brethren, the ingenious and brilliant master seems better possessed of every resource than the power of producing *a second part* to a composition.

over the sense with a holy reviving charm, like the breath of fresh-blown flowers. The air itself is as simple and quaint almost as if it were a Scottish melody, which in many phrases it closely resembles. Brigitta's dainty romance, "Au refectoire" in the third act of "Le Domino Noir," bears a strong likeness to it; but whereas Auber, by employing the same forms of rhythm, and an arrangement of notes curiously similar, has but produced a delicious effect of coquetry, Meyerbeer has expressed the innocence of the Norman girl who heartens herself up when in a strange land, and with evil influences around her, by thoughts of her own village, and of the wayside crucifix she has so often bedecked. Tears and ominous portents interrupt the song; but she clings fast to it, as if there were a protection and a spell in those home recollections. Even when, at last, the Demon confronts her, and she shrinks from his piercing inquisition and his terrible threats, —and the music rises from the colouring of peasant life to that passion which in moments of severe emergency is identical in all ranks—

there is a certain distinguishing nature and freshness retained in her part by artifices rather to be felt than described. It is but in the tremendous final *trio*, when only a few instants more remain for her to achieve her purpose of saving her lord and master from the peril which menaces him, that at last she is swept away by the passion of the scene, and loses entirely her individual rusticity in the holy might of her mission. As an operatic character, perhaps, the one most closely resembling Alice is Weber's Agatha. But then, with the German girl's holy purity the cares of earthly love and expectation are passionately intertwined; witness the well-known inimitable listening scene; whereas, by the inartificial but admirable management of the French *libretto*, the Norman maiden is affianced ere she is brought on the stage, and to one for whom we care nothing. Hence the composer was able to dwell upon her spotless innocence without alloying it by those languid and conventional strains of passionate utterance which repetition has almost made distasteful, and the constant predominance of which de-

prives the Italian opera of so much life and energy.

Of the demon chevalier, Bertram, the third of the group, there would be less to be said, even had I no fear of becoming tiresome in this my expatiation. A Weber only can give to such a snatch of melody as Caspar's drinking song a character as demoniacal in its rough gaiety as belongs to the veriest wearer of horns and tail that ever figured in Callot or Breughel's designs, — but any composer who has harmonic resources at his command can, at pleasure, produce a certain effect which shall be bizarre and supernatural. This, I think, is the sum of what Meyerbeer has done; save, perhaps, in the touch of satanic irony imparted to the phrase which accompanies the words, —

" Mais, Alice, qu'as-tu donc ? "

in the scene at the cavern's mouth already mentioned. The whole devilry of the opera is essentially French, and, as such, not susceptible of the darkness of musical colouring which German sincerity would have thrown over it. The

powers of darkness, who are lying in wait for the soul of Robert, amuse themselves, after the manner of the motley crowds of a *bal masqué*,— or of the myriads who drove off the cold and beguiled expectation, while awaiting the solemn return of Napoleon's ashes to the France who once loved him so well, — by waltzing! Ere the gloom of the scene where the nuns rise from their graves in the cloisters of St. Rosalie can sink deep enough into the mind to impress it with horror, their shrouds fall off, and they, too, come forth in the trim measures and to the dainty music of the dance. The *relations*, indeed, of the Church with the Opera of late have hardly been more strict and intimate than that of the place "not to be named to ears polite," with the *ballet* and *spectacle*. I need but instance "La Tentation," "Le Diable Boiteux," "Le Diable Amoureux," "Les Pilules du Diable," "La Fille du Diable," and other *divertissemens* which are not exactly as Moore describes Love's wings, "of Heaven's own tint." Perhaps the impression of frivolity, which, to me, is stamped on the serious music

of the "Robert" as distinguished from that of "Der Freischutz," may be owing as much to association as to impression, — to the temper of the companions among whom I have heard it, and the comments which never fail to fly about among the audience, when the sepulchral tones of the three bassoons people the moonlight ruin with ghostly shrouds which are to disclose the dainty limbs of Taglioni, or Fitzjames *premier*, or Noblet!

The second time I saw the "Robert" it received an illustration—at least Fancy would have it so — which will associate itself with the magnificent music of the fifth act as long as I live, and is too much in harmony with the present vein of speculation to be omitted. All Paris was just then busying itself in abusing M. le Comte Walewski's comedy "L'Ecole du Monde" — the fashionables of the Chaussée d'Antin, as a traitorous breach of confidence; a French "pencilling" of themselves and their manners on the stage — the nobles of the Faubourg for the *mauvais ton* of its style and incidents — and the sharp-pointed *confrérie* of

dramatists and literary men as an aristocratic usurpation of their territory. Our own Garrick Club in arms against a like invasion from Crockford's could not be more bitter in its sarcasms — could hardly be as fine. The severest, because the best written *feuilleton* appeared in Le Journal des Débats, and perhaps Janin was never in a happier vein than while disclosing the thorough meagreness of the production. For a day and a half — three days after the comedy would else have been forgotten — the one literary question was, "Have you seen the *Débats?*" Well — I was giving myself up to the fifth act of the "Robert," as it deserves: the fine scene for the tenor, supported by the organ and chorus within the church, had been well and passionately, though a little rudely, declaimed by Mario. We were at the final trio, where the spirits of Good and Evil are opposed in the most terrible struggle for the soul of the victim. Just at the point where the Demon is driven to his last resources by the exigency of the moment, and the final climax—having got hold of all eyes, ears, and hearts in the theatre, was hurrying

their interest along as towards a whirlpool — I was touched on the shoulder by ——, who *blasé* with the music, had only then returned to his *stalle*. "*Mais, c'est une chose terrible!*" said he, disregarding my obvious impatience of the interruption. "What a shocking thing! There has been a duel about this article in *Les Débats*. Walewski has shot Janin dead: — *A-propos!*" continued he, pointing to the stage, from which, just as he had told of the fate of the journalist, the Evil Spirit vanished as all evil spirits do (from the theatre) — down a trap-door with a strong smell of gunpowder.

The tale was a shocking one, nor the less so, from having been brought just at the moment when the nerves were in their most excited state. There is something in the glare and fever of Paris which makes the idea of death — most of all such a death — peculiarly repugnant and insupportable. The man, the duel, and the music haunted me all the night in an oppressive and inextricable confusion: the mimic catastrophe and the real event seemed to possess a strange unity; and when I woke, for a moment

or two, I felt as if I had seen the *real* encounter — the real exchange of a busy, frivolous present for an irrevocable future. But consolation and breakfast came in together. I might have been spared my nightmares: the duel and the death had been merely a *conte bleue* — one of those dreadful accidents such as have been sometimes got up for themselves on this side of the Channel by the Rackrents in reputation and influence, who have a mind to see who will mourn their loss the most loudly! Shortly after the papers came my informant, depressed like a man who has been robbed of his tidings; yet not so depressed as one deprived of all his daily fare should look. There were some mitigating circumstances, I was sure: perhaps the duel might yet take place: — no — he had more positive causes of comfort. "Yes, indeed," he said, apologetically, "it is true that there has been no duel between Janin and Count Walewski; but then Madame Laffarge *has* poisoned her husband!" — and with this he launched into the horror of the hour. I thought of the mourners at home, whose

tears for Malibran's death had been dried by the reflection, that "we had not lost every thing," — that Jack Reeve *had* come back from America! *

* The strange mixture of the trivial and the terrible, the "wild laughter in the throat of Death," the spirit of which so strongly pervades modern French manners, French literature, and French art, surely was never more strongly illustrated than in the trial which followed this rumour.

In reporting the proceedings before the court at Tulle, on the 6th of September, when the suspense of the tragedy, already deep enough, was yet further deepened by a second exhumation of the body of the supposed victim, and the then pending experiments of the medical men to determine the presence or absence of poison, the journals of the day detail the examination of M. Louis Philibert de Chauveron. "This honourable witness, whose long deposition, for more than an hour's time, excited the most open amusement on the part of the jury, of the prosecutor and the defender, and *even of the accused herself*, without his perceiving himself to be the cause of it, and without the respect attached to his character and position in the canton or the serious nature of the trial being able to repress its bursts, declared himself to be a jurisconsult at Agas, township of Voutezac." .... While giving his evidence concerning the differences between the dead man and the prisoner who sate at the bar in a dying state, his plainness of manner and double-bass voice are described to have been so

As I listened to ——'s details, little foreseeing their dismal and disgusting sequel, with the sound of the fifth act of "Robert," and the air of "*Le Seduction d'Amour*" still in my ears, it was impossible not to combine the tone of the music with that of the anecdote, and to fancy that the literature and art of France are at least not less consistent with the real nature of the people than they were in the

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irresistible, that "Madame Laffarge put her handkerchief before her mouth, dropped her veil, and it was easy to see, in spite of her precautions, the agitating convulsions of her merriment." At the close of his evidence — still to translate literally from the report in the *Courrier Français* of the 10th of September — "the audience rose in the midst of a general burst of laughter. The spectators laughed on quitting their places — the magistrates on quitting their chairs — the accused herself laughed a long time with her counsel. The people laughed on the steps of the court — laughed in the street — an hour after were laughing at all the *tables d'hôte* in the town. No one arriving from a distance, who, without being forewarned, had been present at the *sortie* of the court-house of the town of Tulle, could have believed that he saw there the same public which the evening before, at the same hour, had issued forth gloomy and silent, under the impression of the harrowing discussions which had been taking place."

days when *belles esprits* and their favourites fluttered their fans and shrugged their shoulders in saucy disdain at the English barbarisms of the gravedigger in Hamlet, and Juliet's nurse, and Lear's poor fool; — when Voltaire protested against Le Kain for showing blood on his arms in "Semiramide," and Mademoiselle Clairon for desiring to have a scaffold erected in the last scene of "Tancrede." The old *convenances* are gone; the old gods and goddesses of the stage, where are they? — swept into the limbo of lost things, or at best galvanised into a strange unnatural life, by the magical talent of Mademoiselle Rachel. For the "Zaire vous pleurez!" we have the more familiar "Vous me faites horriblement mal, Henri!"* for the Alcidor of Marmontel and the Zadig of Voltaire, the Quasimodo of Victor Hugo; for the "Atys" of Lulli and the "Dardanus" of Rameau, the "Robert le Diable" of Meyerbeer. But the sneer and the stilt of the old classical French comedy and tragedy are not wholly extinct. Romanticism does not of

* See the "Henri Trois" of M. Alexandre Dumas.

necessity mean earnest thought, though it implies picturesque colouring; and there remains still a step to be made, by the creative artists of young France, from levity and exaggeration to the artlessness and deep feeling of Nature.

CHAP. IV.

THE ART OPERA — "STRADELLA."

Les gants jaunes. — A Peep into their Box at L'Académie. — Success of French Operas in England.— English and French Amateurship. — Breakfast. — Trial of "Stradella." — Bachelor's Apartments. — Sir E. L. Bulwer's "Man of the World." — M. le Prince de la Moskowa. — M. le Prince Belgiojoso. — The Music of "Stradella;" — Cause of its Failure ; — Its quasi-Italian Style. — A Word upon Eclecticism. — Paër. — Mayer. —Chélard. —Halévy. —Cabals against "Stradella." — The Organ destroyed. — The Libretto, by M. Emile Deschamps. — Its Class of Subject, favourite. — "Le Luthier de Vienne." — "La Symphonie." — "Benvenuto Cellini." —"L'Ambassadrice." — Other Plays and Fictions of the same Class ; — Whether its popularity be good for Art or otherwise.

I HAVE adverted to the close connection between the literature and wit of France and its musical drama; to the direct court influences which also, since the time of Charles the Ninth's proclamation, have had their share in determining its colour. To this day there remain features which distinguish the fashionable amateurship of its patrons from any similar encou-

ragement of national or exotic art in England. *Les gants jaunes* of Paris are better-instructed listeners to music than the corresponding class in London; if they are more despotic in the world behind the scenes, more rigorous in the arrangement of its *im*-morals, according to a strangely methodical rule and system, they are more intelligent before the curtain. I could point to a box in L'Académie Royale, — arranged with a Sybaritic luxury of gilt and damasked elbow chairs, and a tiny *salon* behind it for refreshment, or play — where, even on the hundredth night of an opera, long ere the dance is to begin, some two or three of its tenants may be seen from the very commencement of the performance. The rest, as a body, are far more deeply interested in the composition, far more capable of playing their own favourite *morceaux* on the piano, or of singing the *motivi* which severally suit their voices, than any number of our own fine gentlemen, who make an effort to drop into their places at our Italian Opera, to hear Rubini's last song, or who *begin to listen* just before Fanny Elssler is to exhibit

the first witticism of her dainty feet, or Cerrito to take her first butterfly flutter in air.

A freak of good-natured fortune threw me, on my first visit to Paris, into this dainty enclosure; and, while I remember the courtesy with which the best seat was always pressed upon the shy silent stranger, by those with whom he could have little in common, and whom he has no better means than this of thanking, I cannot forget the intelligent alacrity with which the honours of the music, as well as of the house, were done — the really choice points of Meyerbeer's, and Rossini's, and Auber's grand operas anticipated, as well as this magnificent scene, or that imposing procession, or the other exquisite pair of — ahem! — ankles. In fact, without some such fine intelligence and thorough interest, it would be impossible for the Grand Opera of Paris to maintain its present custom of producing five-act works, each of which suffices for a whole evening's entertainment. The only one of these ever tried in England, the "Robert" of Meyerbeer, was voted tiresome by those who would not take the pains to

hear more than one half of it; while the same fate has befallen others of the earlier masterpieces of L'Académie, which lie in a smaller compass. "La Vestale" of Spontini, in every country save ours recognised as a first-rate work, has never been relished in England. Even the "Guillaume Tell" of Rossini, though aided by the combined talents of Persiani, and Rubini, and Lablache, — the last never more sublime than as its hero, — was not allowed to take root among the cherished "Lucias" and "Lucrezia Borgias" of the Haymarket. "La Muette" was most in favour as a *ballet*, though the *barcarole* and market chorus had their effect when sung at Drury Lane; "Gustavus" throve owing to the prodigal splendours of its masquerade, — which, by the way, with us was arranged in a Gothic building, all vaultings, and screen-work, and pendants! — and to the power of mobbing it among the supernumeraries in domino, conveniently granted by the manager to the patrons of the legitimate drama. "La Juive," again, was admired, because nineteen twentieths of the music were left

out; a blood-stained criminal, fresh broken from the rack, being thrown in by way of compensation for the fine trio, "Pour lui, pour moi, mon père," and the touching "Rachel! quand du Seigneur," M. Halévy's masterpieces in composition.

But, while I insist that it is with the singers and the *spectacle*, rather than the music, that our rich and fashionable playgoers, for the most part, concern themselves, let me not be misunderstood as undervaluing English amateurship in the mass, as compared with French. Our people, by time given and money spent and continuous effort maintained, are proving their zeal and their knowledge to an extent entirely unparalleled by our French neighbours. I need but instance our amateur societies and our provincial festivals. And, small as is our amount of mechanical cultivation, I believe our general knowledge to be at once larger and sounder than theirs, as I may have occasion to illustrate when I speak of the Conservatoire. Nevertheless, the presence of such gifts and graces among the arbiters of Fashion, as are to

be found in Paris, is wanting to us; and the chance of our having a national opera would be largely increased, were Music restored to its old honourable place in the education of an English gentleman, and had he learned to think of its principles and to trace its boundary-lines, instead of "wondering with a foolish face of praise" at its outward and superficial attractions. Till the secrets of the art are better understood, till the due character and coherence of the lyric drama are in some degree considered, the Italian singers will always carry the day; and thus, in a land where government gives no assistance to the stage, that theatre, which requires the most liberal and intelligent patronage and the most unflagging support, to give it a character, if not an existence, — I mean our National Opera, — will be abandoned to scramble along disrespectably as it has hitherto done, maintaining itself on foreign resources, — or, as it now seems about to do, to perish utterly and for ever!

I am recalled by this parallel to one of the most agreeable mornings of my first visit to

Paris — a breakfast given, that M. Niedermayer, then about to produce his "Stradella," might afford some idea of his new work to half a dozen of its protectors. London has nothing so pretty as the scene of this meeting: a suite of bachelor apartments in — no matter what *quartier*. Where we furnish, the French decorate; and the host, like Pope's Timon, "having a taste," the two little rooms themselves contained matter for a chapter, if the minute and graphic writer of "The Old Curiosity Shop" chose to describe them. Luxurious chairs, choice pendules, magnificent old china, flowers, the artificial texture * of which alone was betrayed by their blooming serenely in corners darker

* All the world is familiar with the beauty of French flowers, and a large part of it has read Lady Blessington's anecdote of the Parisian lady, who preferred Nattier's best manufacture to the reality, "because it was much more what a rose ought to be." But I have not seen in any English sketch of Paris any allusion to that most national of all Elysiums — the "Paradis Beaujon," a garden entirely of wire and *batiste*; where the soil, too, was artificial, and artificial manure was placed round the choicer floral specimens, the more entirely to deceive the eye. I know not whether these "dainty devices" are still in existence.

than real camellia or hollyhock would abide, morsels of ruby glass, and Middle-Age jewellery, each with its history, strangely intermixed with insignia of manly occupations — all, if not exquisitely neat, arranged in a graceful disorder;— the eye could not wander among these without, by contrast, calling up some of the smoky, dingy dens, in which the youth of London is contented to dwell; as if manliness lay in discomfort, and good sense and good taste could not be one. It was a skilful touch in Bulwer to make his man of the world, in "Ernest Maltravers," when wishing to be spoken of as a steady and rising person, choose a gloomy house with dusty carpets, dingy curtains, a dim dinner-table, and a cook who lavished flour in the oyster-sauce! No such artist purveyed for ——'s establishment. After the exquisite breakfast, the scene became yet more unlike an English morning conversation-piece. The *Maestro*, or *Kapellmeister*, (for Niedermayer is German in name as well as in the expression of good-humoured and domestic simplicity,) having been placed at the *piccolo*, he

was helped to render the score in duet by the best musician of the party. I may name M. le Prince de la Moskowa, because among his manifold achievements — which one day thrust him into the breach at Constantine, and on another carry him to the top of the most inaccessible mountain of the Pyrences * — he has, in some degree, forfeited the privilege of privacy, by giving an Operetta, "Le Cent Suisse," to the Opera Comique. So, too, when I say that the graceful romance, "Venise est encore au bal," was sung by the best tenor voice in Europe, I may, without indiscretion, name M. le Prince Belgiojoso, since his beautiful published Italian melodies have made him also known to the public. The rest of the little party sang, some of them very well at sight, — all with an almost artistic interest in their occupation; and as the morning went merrily over, I could not but reflect how long and how closely May Fair might be rummaged, without its offering a gathering in any

* See the spirited and graphic account of his ascent of the Vignemale, published by M. le Prince in "La Revue des deux Mondes" for October, 1838.

degree analogous. A grain of that curious prejudice still lurks in England, which, some thirty years ago, asserted, that a man because he knew a little of Music could know nothing else. In *talkers*, upon all the arts, there has never been a deficiency.

The airs and concerted pieces of "Stradella," as far as such a trial enables one to judge of their invention, are graceful, elegant, and expressive; and calculated to give the impression that M. Niedermayer would write a better Italian than French opera, — yet still not a pure Italian work. There is a certain national charm in the music of the born-children of the South which no stranger can ever reach — a joyous exuberance, a prodigal melody, an intensity of tenderness and passion, which ill bear the pruning hand and the severe eye of German science. I have not forgotten the "Agnese" of Paër, and the "Medea" of Simone Mayer, in hazarding this remark; but the one, with all its admirable features — the duet "Qual sepolcro" among the most prominent, — and the other, though it be associated with our best

remembrances of Pasta, have left mixed and confused traces on my memory, in place of the more clear and simpler outlines graven there by the feebler "Nina," of Paesiello, and the spirited "Gli Orazj" of Cimarosa. It is true that an anticipation of almost every Rossinian peculiarity and effect will be found in the music of Paër, yet there is just the difference between the two which exists between an Otho Venius and a Rubens — between the clever man visited by glimpses of invention, and the audacious genius who founds a school. To speak in general terms, the power and the permanence belonging to nationality are things apart, which cannot be attained by the most skilful counterfeiting. Some one or other, criticizing the recent operas by our clever but imitative young English composers, compared them to pictures, which, owing to their being painted in mixed, not pure colours, are apt to fade and turn black in a very short space of time. May it not be said, that all works of the eclectic school have an inevitable tendency to decline in value in proportion as the true principles and deep

meaning of Art are understood?—The thoughtful lover of paintings will surely prefer a Fra Beato, or a Francesco Francia, — nay, or a plain, formal Hans Hemlink, to the loveliest and most correct *cento* of the perfections and graces of all the great masters by the best of the Caracci.

The application of this remark to our own Art accounts for the disproportionately small attention and interest excited by the French school of dramatic music. But it has its limits. Though the base of French opera be manifestly eclecticism, to which Italian melody and German science have each contributed a share; though its *chefs-d'œuvre* have been produced by foreigners; still the structure has proportions and features exclusively its own. Gluck, Spontini, Rossini, and Meyerbeer have been in turns obliged to conform themselves to meet the tastes of French *esprit*. It is only, indeed, by the aid of such conformity and self-sacrifice that a stranger has any chance of insinuating into popularity, in a foreign land, some of the peculiar beauties of his own clime and academy. We

have the instance of M. Chélard in support of this assertion. Never was any man more resolute to be German — German in the harmonies of his "Macbeth" and "Herrmannschlacht" — German in grafting a sociable and hearty good fellowship of manner upon a French ground of politeness and piquant rejoinder. But the fusion has been imperfect: the Frenchman has let out his quadrille tunes and his compliments in wrong times and places; and in spite of a fair measure of original genius, M. Chélard's operas are barely tolerated by the countrymen of his adoption, who nevertheless crowd to hear the barren productions of M. Halévy, which are as pure Paris as the Boulevards, or the *convenances* of classical Tragedy, — for the sake, I verily believe, of their individuality. Thus, also, — to ramble back to my breakfast-party — though I know nothing in "La Juive," or "L'Eclair," so sweetly captivating as parts of the "Stradella," played to us by its composer, and welcomed by the "*bravi!*" of the amateurs who had crowded behind him — "*bravi*," alas! not prophetic — the French composer has a name

and a standing abroad as well as at home; while the German, who wrote Italian music for a French stage, failed utterly, and is now almost as completely forgotten as if he had never composed the "*Lac*," the "*Isolement*," and the "*Automne*" — romances, the grace and delicacy of which have long since placed them on every pianoforte in Paris.

But even had M. Niedermayer's music possessed the charm of special character, familiar or exotic, there were many hindrances in the way of his work succeeding. The path to favour at L'Académie is as thickly sown with pitfalls, and calthrops, and traps for the straightforward, as the footway to the castle of Plessis le Tours described in "Quentin Durward." Highly protected as the composer was, he was most potently caballed against, if all tales be true. On the first night of "Stradella," I have been told that nails were secretly driven into the pipes of the organ which was to produce the chief effect in the great scene in the Basilica.* Many more

* It is almost needless to remind the reader, that Alessandro Stradella's exquisite singing of a sacred

disgraceful tales of a like nature have been circulated; but of the scandal of the world behind the scenes there is no end. Another stumbling block in the way of success, was the *libretto* by MM. Emile Deschamps and Pacini: one out of many proofs how the most graceful lyrist may fail when he condescends to the trammels of musical forms, and how the most beautiful and apparently dramatic story may, by injudicious treatment, be rendered unsuitable for the stage.

This work of Niedermayer's is but one of a large class, in respect of its subject. The anecdote of the singer whose voice and pathos saved his life, — a *replica* of the earlier story of the troubadour Pierre de Castelnau, whose hymn to the Virgin rescued him from the hands of banditti, — has been more than once dramatized for the French stage, having been also thrown into the form of a *vaudeville* for what Mrs. Gore calls "that dirty and amusing

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cantata in St. Giovanni Laterano, entirely softened the hearts of a couple of assassins, hired to murder him by a Venetian nobleman, whose mistress the musician had stolen away. On this anecdote is the opera founded.

little temple of ungodliness," the Theatre Palais Royal. It is, indeed, almost an inevitable consequence of the conditions under which Art has flourished in France, and of the recent invasion of a romanticism, which claims for its subjects either stirring adventure, or psychological singularity, that the adventures and sufferings of the Artist should be in general favour among composers, dramatists, poets, and novelists. At L'Académie Royale, for instance, the casting of Benvenuto Cellini's one great bronze, the Perseus, has been dramatised by MM. Barbier and De Wailly, for the obscure music of M. Berlioz. Nay, even at the Opera Comique, in place of the innocent old ruralities which Gretry and Nicolo set to music, the visiter may chance, as I did, to stumble upon "Le Luthier de Vienne," from Hoffmann's tale of the maiden whose soul has a mysterious connection with the spirit of a violin, or upon some such morbid piece of exaggeration as "La Symphonie" (the music by M. Clapisson), in which the principal character is an insane German composer — one of the most unpleasantly tedious trifles I ever

sat through. Far prettier and more genial is "L'Ambassadrice," in which Auber's delicious music sets off the adventures of a great lady married from the stage — written *at* the Countess Rossi — and deliciously sung and played by Madame Cinti Damoreau. This predilection, manifested in Opera, is again but one of many concentric rings. There are plays of every class and form belonging to the same family, headed by Count Alfred de Vigny's beautiful but melancholy "Chatterton," a work which might have been written by moonlight. At all the distance from "Chatterton," which divides farce from tragedy, come "Kean," "Miss Kelly" (with *Sir* Hudlow for her hero), "Mist*riss* Siddons," "Farinelli," and a score of works beside. The Artist, in short, is followed into his study, his private history is ferretted out, his grossnesses refined, his freaks harmonised by this indiscriminate charity. So he be but German, Italian, or English, it is sufficient. It is curious that while that graphic representative of the *badauds* and *gamins* of Paris as they are — I mean Paul de Kock — is put to the door by

polite personages, and would-be fine *feuilletonists*, as an inmate only fit for the porter's lodge, or the *grisette's* garret; — porter and *grisette* unmoved by this offence against "their order," join the fashionable and poetical world of play-goers in applauding the sighs and spasms of the veriest monstrosity with a foreign artist's name tacked to him, that is paraded on the stage for the hundredth time, by the most superficial reader of the Biographical Dictionaries of Music and Painting.

To question the expediency of making the Artist the hero of any imaginative work would be ridiculous; when, in France alone, "La Dernière Aldini" and "Les Maîtres Mosaistes" of George Sand (one of the most exquisite tales to be found in any language) belong to the literature of the hour: — and when the picturesque tracings of the lives and actions of such men as Durer, Bach, Pergolesi, give a value to the French magazines, at least, as great as our English periodicals derive from the sayings and doings of the heroes of the blind alley and the stable-yard, now so liberally recorded there.

But it is a question, whether in his artistic character he be not too vaporous and spiritual a personage to be presented in action. It may be asked, whether the spirit of the Wise Man of Weimar's remark, that it is "a waste of time to think about thinking," may not be applied to drama and opera; whether for every actor that is acted, and every musician that is sung, something of that necessary enchantment be not stripped away, which gives real splendour to the tinsel of the stage, and warrants Melody as an utterance of emotion. It is a question, in short, how far a taste for such personations may or may not arise, from an unhealthy curiosity, into every thought and feeling "* in the whole flux and reflux of the mind of genius;" a curiosity, the indulgence of which resembles the short-sighted prodigality of the child, who breaks his trumpet, — in reality from satiety of its sound,—in pretence to know how that sound is generated!

* Coleridge. Review of Maturin's "Bertram."

CHAP. V.

THE NATIONAL OPERA — "GUILLAUME TELL."

Anticipation and Fulfilment. — "Guillaume Tell" out of fashion. — M. Eugene Sue. — Anecdotes of Rossini. — How he served Galli. — Rossini and the Drummer. — "Guillaume Tell" in fashion. — Duprez. — Lady Morgan's Judgment of "Guillaume Tell." — Patriotic Operas, and the "Three Glorious Days." — M. Jouy's *Libretto* deficient. — Rossini's general Conception of his Subject. — The Truth of his Colouring. — "Le Vieux de la Montagne." — Reputed Plagiarisms. — A Word concerning Handel. — Rossini's musical Skill legitimately evidenced in "Guillaume Tell." — Its second Act. — Analysis. — The Hunter's Chorus. — Expectation in Music. — The Duet. — The Trio. — Passage from Shelley's "Hellas." — The Finale. — Passage from George Sand's "Lettres d'un Voyageur." — The *Airs de Ballet*. — The Tyrolienne and Taglioni. —The Steps of Frescati's.

I HAVE had few musical wishes stronger than to hear the "Guillaume Tell" of Rossini in Paris. Cloyed as we Londoners had been with Bellini's honeyed, but intensely languid melodies, — the staple of our operatic fare for two seasons, — I looked forward to the representation of this

chef-d'œuvre, with all the impatience of one eager for a new sensation. It is rather comfortless for the musical amateur to reflect, how completely within the range of possibilities it is, that ten years of opportunity should leave him little that is untried to desire. He will do well to recollect, that it is such a moment of satiety, that a pedantic and immoderate preference for some particular school or period is apt to seize hold of the unwary; who forgets how little chance there is of his retaining any balance of judgment, or wholesome powers of enjoyment, if he once become a mere collector or an antiquarian.

To modify the opening phrase of Crabbe's delightful "Lover's Journey" — "It is the soul that hears." This is more than the whole truth; yet there are times, when circumstances throw a wet blanket over the most resolute enthusiasm; and certain it is that my first fulfilment at L'Académie Royale of so long-cherished an expectation left but a very trifling impression on my mind. The night was damp, and deadly cold; the theatre any thing but full — Nourrit

singing feebly — the *soprani* totally inaudible; and the part of the hero, which gives its action to the story, but inefficiently filled by M. Derivis. Only two evenings before I had been hearing "Les Huguenots," which was then in all the freshness of its youth, and had been executed with that spirit which the most sedulous singers cannot always throw into an old work, on a raw November evening: I had been seeing, too, the exquisite pageant of "La Fille du Danube," — a faëry dream, with Taglioni for its Titania! These being both fresh in my memory, the chorus now seemed to move more sluggishly than a chorus is wont to move in the Rue Lepelletier: the dresses looked shabby, and the Alpine scenery faded enough to cause regret, that Orpheus with his lute cannot make a lasting spring for "the plants and flowers" of the scene painter.

That night, too, the party in the —— box, — joined by M. Eugene Sue, the novelist, whose dark and marked features would befit one of his own heroes, and who talks with far more sense and *esprit* than he can make his heroes

talk, — was far more disposed, for a wonder, to converse than to listen. The management was blamed for having allowed Madame Cinti Damoreau, the original Matilde of "Guillaume Tell," to make over her services to the Opera Comique: — Mademoiselle Nau, who that night was to fill the part, had not ripened into the pretty singer on a small scale she has since become, and was only seen, not heard. Then came up the never-failing question, which had the more genius, Rossini or Meyerbeer?

"Meyerbeer a genius, indeed!" exclaimed one of the party, eager for the honour of his countryman, "Meyerbeer has cleverness, if you will: but as to genius!..... cleverness enough in managing the press, no doubt. Never did any man work so hard for a success. He paid, you know, half the money for the decorations in the 'Robert.' Nothing is lost upon him; he knows how to conciliate every one: here an embrace, there a smile; there is not a *feuilletonist* to whom he has not given a *déjeûner* or a dinner. You should see him caressing —— or ——! Yes, he has a bait for every body.

Now Rossini cannot restrain himself, whatever were the consequence: joke he must, when the humour seizes him. What did he say but the other day, when somebody was entreating him to give us another opera: 'What need have you of me? Surely you have composers enough in France — Mademoiselle Bertin, and Meyerbeer, and Mademoiselle Puget!'"

"Then I do not despair of Rossini," cried another, "if he said so. He can't bear Meyerbeer. Wherever there is pique there must be rivalry. I would give something to see the two men fairly tried against each other. I would bet ——"

"You had better not," replied the first speaker. "I would advise no one to enter the lists against Rossini, indolent as he is. You remember the trick he played Galli — *the* Galli — when he brought out 'La Gazza' at Milan. The two had quarrelled: it was about Madame ——, a certain *cantatrice*, Rossini's sixtieth love! No matter, he was not to be distanced by a singer. Well, Galli had two or three false notes in his voice which he could touch, but

not rest upon. What does Rossini? writes him a d—— of a recitative — and in the great scene, too, where the deserter Fernando tells his story to Ninetta — with a great word to speak, and an emphasis on every weak note! The first representation came on. *Bref*, Galli broke down, and Rossini carried off the lady! One must sing in tune before one dares quarrel with his *maestro*, it seems. Depend upon it, if he please, Rossini has strength enough in his little finger to throw Meyerbeer over whenever he likes! But he never will;" — and the magnificent-looking *raconteur* shrugged his shoulders with that "*Cosa fare?*" gesticulation which is as incommunicable, after its Italian fashion, as the Irish twist. "All that Rossini cares about now is where to find the best oysters and the best wine. Unless the King or Madame P—— contrive to make him a poor man again, you will get no more operas from Rossini. Don't listen to that woman, Mr. ——; she sings false, with an assurance which is prodigious." The woman was Mademoiselle Flecheux.

"A-propos of 'La Gazza,'" said some one else: "did you hear the story of Rossini and

the drummer the other day? Every one comes to him, you know; and he was sitting yawning in his *robe de chambre*, when a fellow was shown in, wretchedly shabby and poor, — eager of course to have his fortune made, and certain Rossini would make it: he is very generous to all those *misérables!*

"'Well,' said he, 'what am I to do for you? An artist? What sort of a voice have you got?'

"'No voice, Monsieur Rossini; I am an instrumentalist; but if you will only ——'

"'Ah! What instrument then?'

"'The drum, *Monsieur!* and if you will let me play to you ——'

"'*O, par exemple!*' exclaimed Rossini, bursting into a fit of laughter. 'No, thank you: and besides we have no drum here.'

"'But I have brought mine with me.'

(I could not but remember how a friend of mine was once waited upon by the patentee of a new fire-engine, who offered to accredit his invention by then and there exhibiting its powers — in his library!)

"'*Diable!* but I cannot think of your taking so much trouble! — you play beautifully I am sure! I had better at once give you a note to Mr. Tilmant.* Pray don't bring it in!'

"But the Professor was not to be got rid of. In the drum came, and Rossini screwed himself up for an infliction. 'I shall have the honour,' said the suitor, 'of playing for you the overture to 'La Gazza Ladra.'

"'Ah!' . . . . and Rossini laughed again. Well, the fellow began without more waiting; and after the tremendous roll which opens the march in the overture, looked up, delighted with the noise he made.

"'*Monsieur*,' said he, 'here are now sixty bars' rest — we will pass them over, and ——.'

"'I beg you will do no such thing,' replied Rossini, gravely. '*Pray count them!*'"

So much for my first introduction to "Guillaume Tell." I find little else in my journal, save

* The conductor of the orchestra at the Italian Opera in Paris.

a brief note on the surpassing beauty of the trio in the second act, during which the fire of anecdote ceased. A twelvemonth later the opera was in favour again — all Paris ran to hear it, as though it had been produced the week before; and *les gants jaunes* were as punctual to the overture, and as diligently humming the melody of *the* duet, and of the Tyrolienne, as if ten years, and a revolution, had not passed since their first appearance; — and as if Strauss, the delight of Vienna, had not just arrived to revive the waning attractions of the Concert Musard!

The theatre was as full as it could hold. The overture had passed, and the brilliant applause which followed it: the rich and melodious introduction had been executed with freshened costumes and scenery — when a *salvo* of welcome, such as we rarely hear in England, greeted the entrance of the new favourite, and explained the change from lukewarmness to eagerness which had sympathetically drawn me into the vortex. The new favourite was Duprez.

Of him, not to digress beyond all rational bounds, I may speak elsewhere — at present, of Rossini's music; because a right appreciation of it is, I think, still to come for the amateurs of England.

One of the pleasantest chapters in Lady Morgan's second work on France — one of our few modern English chapters on French music — contains some plausible speculations on the state of the art in Paris, a sprightly account of a rehearsal of "Guillaume Tell," and a prophecy as to its future fate. The music, she found, though not cold, "grave, solemn, and church-like," — rather calculated for the latitude of France in particular, than of the world in general. Though, as far as concerns London, the prognostication has been fulfilled; and though the opera has been hissed at San Carlos, by audiences that call for a Ricci or a Coppola, eighteen times or more, to applaud them for their last trumpery confection, — yet "Guillaume Tell" has been for the last eleven years one of the most popular opera in the European repertory. It has penetrated wherever

song can pierce, and is now generally owned to be the *Maestro* of Pesaro's best claim upon posterity.

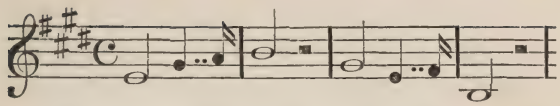
I know not whether the choice of its subject may be admitted to illustrate French opinion at a most critical period of French history; but certain it is, that the three principal lyrical dramas which appeared before the dethronement of Charles X. had a family likeness in their idea — liberty and resistance to despotism being the theme of "Le Siège de Corinthe," — "La Muette de Portici," — and "Guillaume Tell;" and that the two last, under certain cautious European censorships, have been from time to time prohibited as little less dangerous than the fatal "Figaro" of Beaumarchais. But the question, whether the order was casual or inevitable by which these historical dramas preceded the mystical romance of "Robert," and the art-operas of "Stradella" and "Benvenuto;" — whether, in short, Revolution must not open the way for licentious imagination, and the latter of necessity subside into a morbid contemplative-

ness — may be left to stronger thinkers and better experienced observers. Let us confine ourselves within narrower limits — to a special consideration of Rossini's master-work. And, first, to speak of the book; — it is vexatious to observe how heavily its inferiority and want of interest, and the peculiar construction of the company for which it was written, weighs upon the popular acceptation of "Guillaume Tell." To be sure, in the undramatic ponderosity of his poem, Rossini is not more unfortunate than Mozart was in his "Flauto Magico," or than Weber in his "Euryanthe;" and the fact that his work, like these, still lives and circulates, is a fair test of its musical merit: — ten years giving a tolerable promise for twenty more. The few situations which the *libretto* contains are cumbrously introduced: the entrance of Gessler's soldiers at the end of the first act, takes place after all the principal characters have withdrawn from the scene; — the conspiracy, at the end of the second, is helped to a dramatic force and climax by the accumulation of supernumeraries, and by the rising sun

of the scene-painter. Again, Tell's miraculous shot—an incident at best intractible — is dramatically spoiled by the sudden entrance of Matilda, which distracts the spectator from the suspense of the moment at the price of a very fine concerted piece. In fact, a heroine, who shall have a part in the story, sufficiently important, or sufficiently prominent, is eminently needed. As Madame Cinti Damoreau, at the time of its composition, was little more than what some satirist has called a "walking *solfeggio*," the principal female part was restricted within the tamest possible outlines, and made all but episodical; while Tell's wife and son were so awkwardly manœuvred by M. Jouy, as to become mere accessories in the concerted music: and are thus placed, in these ambitious times, beneath the adoption of songstresses of high pretension. Hence, as inferior *artistes* generally undertake the parts in question, the first act is, in nine representations out of ten, entirely deprived of the charm of a *soprano* voice.

Mistakes and deficiencies like these, — far more fatally to be felt in a long-drawn work of

four acts, than in operas of the usual brevity,— would have paralysed the genius of any one save a first-rate composer. But it was not so with Rossini: he had been denounced by certain of his bigoted antagonists, as incapable of illustrating any subject intellectually; — as one prodigal of melody by instinct rather than from purpose; and who lavished musical solecisms throughout his scores with the wanton audacity of ignorance. Possibly he may have addressed himself in the "Guillaume Tell" to confound these narrow-minded purists; — but it is more probable, that the peculiar resources of L'Académie suggested to him, unconsciously, the path he must take; for he has never been accused of thinking profoundly upon his art. Be this as it may, "Guillaume Tell" stands almost alone as an example of local and national colour given to a historical subject. The echoes of the hills — those peculiar intervals which give their character to all the Tyrolese melodies,— are to be heard in almost every subject, from the *Ranz des vaches*, so felicitously introduced into the overture, and the yet simpler phrase



on which is based the charming concerted movement in the introductory scene — to Matilde's *entrata*, " Sombres forets," — to the charming *airs de ballet* which precede and follow the well-known Tyrolienne, — and to the slow symphony of the " Asile héréditaire," which now closes the opera. It has been said that, according to his usual *poco-curante* fashion, the composer in the new work used up sundry pieces already written for another work, " Le Vieux de la Montagne ; " but this is hardly credible, so strongly, and yet without monotony of effect, does one spirit pervade the whole music. Others have told, that the splendid plagiarist was furnished with the melody of the Tyrolienne, and other real Swiss airs, by some obscure music-master in the *départemens*, who has never come forward to substantiate the claim. If this be true, the skill can hardly be sufficiently admired with which crude and wild snatches of song have been combined and wrought into the

fairest forms of Art; and the genius of selection and appropriation becomes well nigh as admirable as the genius of creation. And should any be at all disposed to contest Rossini's merits on this score, let them remember the wholesale literal borrowings of Handel, and declare whether the composer of "Messiah," is to be degraded from his throne, because the pompous commencement of his overtures is a form derived from Lulli — because the pattern of much of his *remplissage* had been set by Corelli; and because the "Pastoral Symphony," — that music where "*one feels the starlight*," as Zelter has poetically said, — is neither more nor less than an ancient measure probably Italian, the theme of which had been printed, note for note, under the title of "Parthenia," in "The Dancing Master," some sixty years before "The Messiah" was thought of!

Scarcely less remarkable than this exquisite propriety of taste with which Rossini has created music of a character in itself unique, (doctors disagreeing as to its being French or German,) is the care and finish bestowed by him

upon its elaboration, with an honest conformity to the canons of composition. This was hardly to be expected from one who had notoriously studied so little. On examining the grand operas of Meyerbeer, a thousand artifices will be discovered to heighten effect, to which a composer of more spontaneous genius would have had no need to resort: — changes of key, changes of rhythm*, oddities of instrumentation,

* If Handel was unscrupulous in availing himself of the inventions of others, he was also prodigal in his experiments. It is surprising how many of the tricks of form, in vogue among the younger composers, are shadowed forth, as it were, in his works. While studying the scores of Meyerbeer, and wondering at the patchwork so clever a musician has allowed himself to introduce there, I happened, on another quest, to be turning over Handel's less-known oratorios and operas; and came upon so many curious examples of mixed time as almost amount to precedent for Meyerbeer's liberty in this matter, though their regular recurrence be calculated to give an eccentric symmetry to the airs in which they appear; while in the younger composer's case, the intention is merely to deceive the ear. In "La Resurrezione" there is the air of Mary Magdalene; "Del figlio dolente," in which three bars of *Corelli-pattern* in common time, are thrust into an air in $\frac{3}{8}$. In Poppea's song, "Bel piacere" in "Agrippina," two *staccato* crotchets are yet more oddly inter-

not to be analysed or pressed upon too severely, but assuredly dangerous as models. He who, working on a plan, controls Science to do the bidding of his fancy, must always rank higher than he who accumulates every incongruity, and makes one fragment hide the patched edges of another, — satisfied if the whole passes at a distance. There is nothing of this trick of hand in Rossini: the separate pieces of his opera, however complicated, however long, are conducted skilfully, and by allowable progressions. Let me instance the entire conduct of the second act, recommending it strongly to the student as an example of climax. He will find five distinct gradations in the five musical pieces of which it is composed. The first gives the tone of the scene and the hour — it is a merry hunting

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polated again and again, in a movement of similar measure. The songs, "When the trumpet sounds to arms" in "Susanna," and "Hark, hark!" in "Alexander Balus," may be cited as other examples of construction, which in those days may have seemed audaciously, and perhaps even lawlessly, peculiar. None of these devices, however, are to be found in the specimens of Handel's matured and perfected genius.

chorus, opening brilliantly with a flourish of horns, and the shout of the gathered mountain rangers. A simpler melody could not be found, nor yet one more happily clear of the vulgarity which a triple rhythm, and the restricted powers of the instruments employed, are so apt to stamp upon all lively music *à la chasse*. But it is an evening song; and, accordingly, a pause allows the measured chime of a distant bell to be heard, with a sunset hymn of herdsmen accompanying in mellow and melancholy harmony the decline of day, and the approach of a time of repose. The burden of the hunter's song is resumed, but with a diminished vivacity; there is a *farewell*,— to speak fancifully,— in the reiterated notes and the dying fall of the wind instruments, and in the detached tones given to the voices as the singers withdraw, leaving the margin of the lake to the stars and the dew, silent and lonely — the very field for Expectation. And Expectation (unless Fantasy has misled me into the folly of Sterne's simile maker,) is indeed expressed strongly, and beyond mistake, in the second change — in Ma-

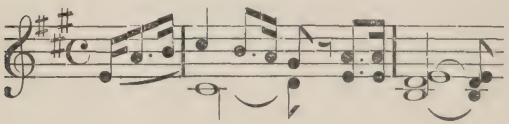
tilda's recitative and the romance which follow; — from the finely descriptive first symphony to the passionate and yearning close of the air,

a phrase in itself so thoroughly expressive, that it is next to impossible that a singer should utter it coldly. The calm of the hour — the gentle stir of leaves — the murmur of night airs across the bosom of the lake, are not more strongly expressed in the accompaniment than the tenderness and anxiety of human affection in the vocal part. But Expectation is not to be fruitless. The third change opens to us fulfilment — the passionate dialogue — the rapturous mutual confession — the delicious repose of assured love — the resolution to do and to dare all honourable achievements, that love between Nobility and Lowly Birth may be justified (for she is an Emperor's daughter, and he but a

dweller in a châlet), — are not all these to be found in the duet between Matilde and Arnold? and displayed without a single artifice of musical resource which is not natural or warrantable? There are few things of the kind off the German stage more intense than this composition; and it would seem hard, at its close, to sustain the excitement to which the hearer has been wrought: — I say the hearer, for action and story can here have no part in his emotion.

This excitement, however, Rossini has sustained, nay, surpassed, in the fourth musical piece of the act. Far-famed though this be, it has never been heard in England. On its being performed at our Italian Opera, Rubini's voice was entirely too feeble to support the *stretto;* and the orchestra — in spite of Signor Costa's best care — remained, to the last, unsteady in its accompaniment. It is almost superfluous to remark, that in this composition, which succeeds immediately to the scene just mentioned, the lover is aroused from his dream by his indignant friends; the struggle between Passion and Patriotism is stirred by their de-

tailing to him that his own father has become victim to Gessler's tyrannous cruelty; and the desire to avenge his country at length absorbs every softer feeling. I know not whether it has ever occurred to any one beside myself, that in the leading idea, both of the commencement and of the close of this trio, Rossini's inspiration has been unconsciously tinctured by his Parisian residence: — that a distant but indistinct reminiscence of "La Marseillaise" is traceable in the martial and peremptory abruptness of the opening musical phrase,



merging in a grander and more flowing melody, analogous to that of "Marchons! Marchons!" when the composition reaching the point, —

rises to the highest elevation of enthusiasm.

Be this as it may, Courage never uttered its unselfish defiance with a more enkindling animation than in the final Tyrtean hymn. Well might Nourrit be the idol of the *parterre* after the days of the Barricades, when to a soul of fire like his, and at such a time, was given such a glorious and ennobling medium for its utterances! The language of homely prose becomes poor, and the pen powerless, to describe the emotions which are stirred by music so lofty and so brilliant; and it is a relief to turn to the poets who have written the best of liberty and deliverance, for an expression of some of the high thoughts and generous aspirations which struggle so painfully through the head and heart of the uninspired, — to such a strophe as this, for instance, from the "Hellas" of Shelley, —

"In the great morning of the world,
The Spirit of God with might unfurl'd
The flag of freedom over Chaos,
And all its banded anarchs fled,
Like vultures frighten'd from Imaus,
Before an earthquake's tread.—
So, from Time's tempestuous dawn,
Freedom's splendour burst and shone:—

Thermopylæ and Marathon
Caught, like mountains beacon-lighted,
The springing Fire. The winged glory
On Philippi half alighted,
Like an eagle on a promontory.
Its unwearied wings could fan
The quenchless ashes of Milan.
From age to age, from man to man,
It lived ; and lit from land to land
Florence, Albion, Switzerland.
Then night fell : and, as from night,
Reassuming fiery light,
From the West swift Freedom came,
Against the course of heaven and doom,
A second sun array'd in flame,
To burn, to kindle, to illume.
From far Atlantis its young beams
Chased the shadows and the dreams.
France, with all her sanguine streams,
Hid, but quench'd it not : again
Through clouds its shafts of glory rain
From utmost Germany to Spain.
As an eagle fed with morning
Scorns the embattled tempest's warning,
When she sees her eyrie hanging
In the mountain-cedar's hair,
And her brood expects the clanging
Of her wings through the wild air,
Sick with famine — Freedom so,
To what of Greece remaineth now,
Returns : her hoary ruins glow,
Like orient mountains lost in day :

Beneath the safety of her wings
Her renovated nurslings play,
And in the naked lightenings
Of truth they purge their dazzled eyes,
Let Freedom leave where'er she flies
A desert or a paradise —
Let the beautiful and brave
Share her glory, or a grave."

The *finale* to the second act—the last of the five gradations mentioned — has yet to be spoken of. It was well done of Rossini, after a strain of so thrilling an excitement as the trio, to allow an interval of comparative repose — the occasion being furnished by the covert approach and gradual entrance of the men of the three Cantons. What invention is here ! — what variety ! How characteristic and distinct is the music of each tribe; yet how naturally and solidly are the three different airs bound together by a few emphatic and significant phrases, till, in confluence, they burst out in the inspiriting triple chorus, "Guillaume, tu le vois !" and afterwards reply to the hero's address, in eager antiphony, which, wrought up to a sublime climax, leads to the solemn dedication of their swords and lives

to the cause of Freedom! Here, the situation is far more the work of the musician than of the poet; so intensely picturesque and appropriate is the chain of movements by which the close is brought on. At first we have snatches of melody, like the sighing of the night wind over the shadowy lake, and among the columnar pines; then airs, which themselves suggest motion, and number, and diversity of costume; then an outburst of fiery impatience; then the stern catechism, and the eager reply; and, lastly, a whole people devoting itself to a noble purpose, in the presence of ancestral mountains, and with the eye of newly-risen Day upon it, to register the sacred oath. It is in a deep spirit of appreciation of this noble scene that, in her letter to Meyerbeer, George Sand (Madame Dudevant), after having measured the boundaries of descriptive music with "the golden reed" of true poetry, breaks out, — "How many a time have I anathematised the mimic sunrise which accompanies the last chorus of the second act of 'Guillaume Tell!' O machinery of canvas, pasteboard, and tinsel, what need is there of

you to that magnificent prayer, — where the whole rays of the sun expand majestically, increase, blaze abroad, and seem from the horizon to strike out into glory the peaks of the snow mountains at the last note of the sacred strain? The music has a power beyond yours."

One more feature of peculiar excellence in the "Guillaume Tell" deserves notice, — the vigour and variety of its choruses and *airs de ballet*. Important as the latter have always been to a grand French opera, — the unbending Gluck himself having been compelled to arrange gavottes and minuets to suit the taste of the dancers of his time, — there is in this part of Rossini's work an originality and a completeness which raise him high above his competitors. Witness the first Swiss chorus and dance, the robust and spirited music of the archery scene; and Gessler's pageant, with its superb marches, and its brilliant soldiers' waltz — one of the two movements, the first *finale* being the other, in which Rossini's old *crescendo* is employed. Witness the *Tyrolienne*, in itself a gem of grace, and melody, and pastoral freshness, even when dis-

engaged from all remembrance associated with her who doubled its attractions by her own! To write music which a Taglioni shall adopt, and which shall still stand alone, by its own strength and invention, when a Taglioni has laid it aside, is no common feat. To characterise that particular dance would require a playfulness as airy and delicate, and a pen as subtly pointed, as the King of the *feuilletons* has employed when tracing "*La Sylphide's*" * career of triumph. Happily, the attempt is not called for: the tune is on every pianoforte, on every street-scraper's kit, on every Savoyard's *vielle*. Worn and familiar, but beyond the power of street-scraper or Savoyard to vulgarise, it has the welcome beauty and sweetness of one of those flowers which never lose their elegance, whether found in some high hedgerow, betraying their hiding-place by their scent, or thrust forth in the feverish hand of the haggard seller of bou-

* The criticisms of Jules Janin upon Taglioni, which have appeared in Le Journal des Debats, are in his happiest and most fanciful vein; and are worth collecting for their own sake, as well as hers whom they commemorate.

quets on the stairs of a gaming-house.* But, lest Speculation run too far into "a thousand needless similies," I had better have done, however unwilling to leave a work so full to overflowing with the beauty and health, and life which endure, as the "Guillaume Tell" of Rossini. To relish it properly, it should be heard in Paris; and were I the King of the French, I would emulate Napoleon's absolutism in theatricals, that it might be heard, once at least, with Lablache for hero, — and for its Arnold, Duprez.

* This illustration is not employed at random. I passed some hours at Frescati's, as a looker-on, a very few evenings before it was closed for ever by the Citizen King. To watch the mechanically silent routine of the gaming-table, and the haggard impassive faces of those that sat round it, was a sufficiently painful excitement; and I know not that I was ever more startled than, upon leaving those glaring and mysterious saloons, — where so much Passion and Despair had silently wrought their work in former days, — to be accosted by the shrill importunity of a meanly-dressed girl, little more, indeed, than a child, who was crouched at the foot of the staircase, an hour after midnight, with a basket full of bunches of violets. These, she vociferated, were "fresh gathered," to sell to the company as they came out!

CHAP. VI.

DUPREZ.

French Tenor Singing. — Garat. — Geliotte. — Elleviou. — Foolish Rumours concerning Duprez. — First Impression of his Appearance. — A Sketch of his early Days ; — His Training in Italy ; — His Position on his Arrival at Paris ; — His *Début* in " Guillaume Tell." — The last Song. — The Part of *Arnold*. — Duprez ill supported. — Duprez as an Actor in " La Muette ;"— In " La Juive." — Duprez as *Otello*. — Extract from Journal.—A young Spanish Princess.—The present Position of Duprez in Paris.—Failure of the " Benvenuto Cellini " of M. Berlioz. — *Feuilleton* of the latter, touching Theatricals in general, and Duprez in particular. — Whimsical Calculation of his Emoluments ; — Their influence on Opera.

A GALLERY of French tenor singers would not be the least edifying chamber in the Pantheon of Art. Few traces would be there found, it is true, of the well-toned and well-cultivated voices, which distinguished the great men of the Italian opera. That they sung through their noses, is as certain as that the Parisian opera songstresses terrified Dr. Burney and Horace

Walpole, by their energetic screaming. Many of them, too, were afflicted with that diseased tendency towards a *falsetto*, which, in our own country, has run the inordinate length of pushing innocent, portly, middle-aged gentlemen into warbling (more oddly to the eye than agreeably to the ear) the sublimest songs of Handel's "Messiah." In hastily running over the record of the achievements of French singers, ancient and modern *, I have been struck by finding so many of them possessed of something more than that staple of our English theatrical vocalists — the "Vox et præterea nihil." The story of Garat's early life, for instance, is pecu-

* I cannot but here express my acknowledgments to the "Biographie des Musiciens" of M. Fétis, which, as far as it has been carried, is a perfect storehouse of anecdote and information touching French art. As regards other countries, his entries are far less satisfactory. In English music, for instance, he is strangely incomplete and astray, as Mr. Braham must think, should he happen to see it stated that he died of the cholera in the month of August, 1834! It is a question whether the omissions or admissions of M. Fétis are the most curious. But the French return the compliment of English indifference to their music with a thorough good-faith which is amusing.

liarly agreeable. He had been destined by his father for the profession of an advocate ; but, being sent from Bourdeaux to Paris to finish his studies, was seduced from the service of Jurisprudence to that of St. Cecilia, by his intimacy with the Chevalier St. Georges *, and by the arrival of Mesdames Todi and Mara — the Sontag and Malibran of their day—who finished the work Nature had begun, and made a further perusal of codes and pandects impossible. He *must* be a singer ! His father, a severe man, discountenanced his son's change of pursuits, as

* This Chevalier St. Georges was a remarkable man in the musical annals of Paris during the eighteenth century ; a clever violin player, a composer of agreeable operas,— like the infamously celebrated La Maupin, a capital fencer, — and a man of notorious success in the world *des bonnes fortunes*. He was, however, a Creole : and upon his presenting himself to Government as a candidate for the directorship of the Opera, about the year 1776, a memorial was addressed to the Queen, by Mesdemoiselles Sophie Arnould, Guimard (the *danseuse* who, like the old Countess of Desmond, figured "on the floor" after she was sixty), La Beaumesnil, Rosalie, and other actresses, representing that their honour and their privileges alike forbade their subjecting themselves to the control of a coloured man.

uncompromisingly as any English father in the law could have done. Even when the youth was raised to the brilliant position of secretary to Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, and had been promoted to take part in the Queen's private musical performances — to the young man's pleadings, that Art as well as Law might open ways to distinction, he vouchsafed only this stern reply: "I am aware that, in the degenerate days of Rome, musicians and mimes were favourites with the Emperors." But there was something honest and generous in this French Saunders Fairford. On the young Garat happening to visit Bourdeaux in his patron's train, it was proposed to him to sing in a concert to be given for the benefit of Beck, his music-master, who was at that time in misfortune. The artist hesitated thus publicly to outrage the prejudices of his father: who, to the surprise of every one, said, "My son's talent has cost him an honourable establishment, and his father's friendship: let it at least afford him the opportunity of doing a good action." A

reconciliation could not but follow so honest a display of right feeling.

Though Garat be, perhaps, solitary in his position and his resources, it is remarkable how many other of the French singers have given signs of ability beyond the narrow sphere of our own throats. Geliotte, for instance, wrote the music of several ballets; Elleviou three opera books. In our own day Duprez, and Masset of the Opéra Comique, are agreeable composers. I could bring half a score more of similar examples for the benefit of our aspirants to the operatic stage of England. If such a thing is ever again to exist, great would be the gain of their remembering that a variety of attainments are but a variety of chances for success; — that the singer who acted as secretary to a Prince, must have had the demeanour of good society; — that the singer who could write an opera book, could hardly be a stupid actor; — that the singer who can compose respectably, must needs be a good musician.

From a few meditated speculations on the ancient manner of singing in France, I have

been led away to the manners and cultivation of the artists too far to return without fear of becoming prosy. After all, so entirely gone are the days when it might be said of the Orfeo or Roland of L'Académie, or the Romeo or Joconde of the Opéra Comique, "such or such a nose has a good voice," that past malpractices and false traditions may be left to those who make themselves uneasy about fossil music; and no further preamble is needed to a sketch of the most extraordinary tenor singer I have ever heard. I was introduced to him, as has already been said, on my second hearing of "Guillaume Tell," in the November of the year 1837.

What I expected in Duprez it is now hard to recollect. Some of those floating nursery tales had preceded him, with which a credulous public delights to stimulate its curiosity with regard to any celebrated artist. There was an anecdote of the Neapolitan steamers having sailed from port, without passengers, leaving the latter enthralled in San Carlos, by the magnificent singing of Duprez in "Le Bravo," — another of some wonderful confection, by which a poor

thread of a voice had been wrought up into one of the most powerful organs in Europe. One does not ask concerning a singer, "What is he like?" or "How tall may he be?" And my curiosity had been only confined to the voice and style of him who had driven the idol of Paris from his throne at the Opera.

Never was I more surprised by the aspect of any person, than by the appearance of the successor to poor portly Nourrit. We have read of "an interesting ugliness," — of a discord of feature and proportion, in the midst of which some element of fascination yet remains, or which charms by its capability of receiving the impress of strong and varied expression. But never was this seeming paradox so strikingly instanced as in the case of Duprez. A short man, his figure tapering from his head downwards— eyes, though keen and piercing, any thing but handsome; a mouth, wearing a sour and saturnine expression when closed, and when opening, (Heaven knows how widely!) giving the face the aspect of a grotesque mask; — gaunt cheeks and sullen lips alike ungarnished by any

of the trimming of beard or *moustache* with which the youths of France know how to cover barren places, or to balance too prominent features — a high beetling forehead, with veins that swell and writhe like serpents on passionate occasions — and hair neither profuse nor growing gracefully — such are the entries to be found in my journal of 1837 to the discredit of the outer man of Duprez. I am now much inclined to dispute their correctness, and, like my friend Madame ——, to aver that he is the handsomest man in France.

Certain it is, that of all the tenor singers I have ever heard, on the stage, this admirable artist appears to me to rise the highest. The quartett, of which Pasta would be the *soprano*, Pisaroni the *contralto*, and Lablache the bass, might claim him for fourth. His style is worthy of theirs. In voice, Nature has not been too liberal. The organ may naturally have been thick, inflexible, and, however much wrought out by unceasing study, will probably never be rendered capable of that spontaneous and florid execution with which Rubini knows so well

how to conceal the ravages of Time. There is no manufacturing an Italian voice: and M. le Prince Belgiojoso is still unapproached in my experience, as regards manliness, sweetness, and quality of tone, — his glorious countryman Donzelli not forgotten. Duprez was born at Paris in the year 1806, of respectable and humble parentage. He was early placed under the tuition of that indefatigable enthusiast, M. Choron, and appeared at the Odéon, during the time that that theatre was open as a third opera house, with little or no success. His voice is said then to have been very poor, and his style conformable. But so it was said of Pasta, by the insolent wardrobe-woman, whose contempt of the Medea in embryo is on record. Enough that Duprez left Paris in 1828; M. Choron alone prophesying a bright future to him, for he had possibly the best knowledge of his pupil's energy. And certain it is, that, while going through the schooling of Italian vocalisation, he must have run a course of *cavatinas* and airs, seductive enough to enervate the style of any one less essentially and resolutely

energetic, and to unfit him for character, as compared with song, singing. His great Italian successes were won in such insipid parts as the lover's in "Parisina," "Lucia," "Beatrice di Tenda," &c. &c. Worse preparation than these for the French opera, in some respects, could hardly be imagined: for the Parisian tenor must act as well as sing; must understand the mystery of situation, as well as of *falsetto;* and deliver his recitative with character, as well as warble sweetly the peculiar melody which suits his humour. The French opera-books are tragedies or comedies. The French opera public is very nearly as dramatic as it is vocal. A more trying position for an artist could hardly be imagined than Duprez was called upon to take when he returned to Paris. On the one side was Rubini delighting all the frequenters of the Salle Favart by his delicious finish, and his voluptuously passionate expression — a dangerous rival for any singer one half Italian! On the other side, was a company which had been half formed and modelled by Nourrit, and which was too soon deprived of a *prima donna*,

able, in right of grandeur of style, to afford him the support he required — by the retirement of the ill-fated Falcon. The repertory of parts, too, which Duprez was called upon to undertake, had been written for a voice higher than his own, and, though not absolutely devoid of room for the display of large expression, was, nevertheless, more largely interspersed with passages of agility, and phrases constantly pushed not merely to the heights — but to the pinnacles, as it were — of the extreme *falsetto*, than any music calculated advantageously to exhibit Duprez should be. Such preparations and such difficulties being taken into account, the triumph was as extraordinary as complete which he achieved on his first appearance in "Guillaume Tell." His new, fervid, and powerful spirit lighting up an old and familiar part, gave it a reading as different as possible from all past readings, but felt to be legitimate and satisfactory. If there was less fineness of diction in his recitative, there was a musical force and pathos in every sound of it which Nourrit never reached. If he could not

throw out the high *soprano* passages of certain movements (some reaching the extravagance of C sharp in the treble scale) with as prompt a point and brilliancy as his predecessor, there was felt to be dignity, a rhythm, and an impressiveness in his *cantabile,* far beyond all "the sentiment through the nose" of any singer more exclusively Gallic in training. And, as it were, to clench the conviction that the French opera had made a step and gained a treasure in his acquisition, after having wrought up the two duetts, and the trio, with the utmost care, and taken his share in the business of the stage during three acts with unflagging energy and care, — he wound up the part by electrifying, with a double measure of force, animation, and vocal power, the final "Asile héréditaire." It is an era in the musician's experiences of tenor singing to have heard that song. There is a might and a passion in the delivery of the theme of the martial *cabaletta* so resistless, that when the whole chorus joins in his ritornel, "Suivez moi!" — to me, at least, the whole machinery of orchestra, and foot-lights, canvas

châlet, and glacier of plank, fades away; and I hear the march of a mighty people, unconquerable in the force of a noble object!

The part of Arnold offers little or no scope for the actor, and yet Duprez as completely fills the stage by its presence as did Lablache, in London, by his noble presentment of the hero's more prominent character. No one in Paris acts ill; but the "Guillaume" of L'Académie has, since the arrival of Duprez, become a person of secondary interest. During the three years which have elapsed since as Arnold he won his first home triumphs, he has been the main stay of L'Académie, in defiance of circumstances any thing but favourable. The new operas written for him, have, save Donnizetti's last, "La Favorite," been all failures: — the new *cantatrici*, brought forward to replace Mademoiselle Falcon — a series of raw school girls from the Conservatoire, whom it was necessary to make disappear in rapid succession. But Duprez has never failed himself or the public. I have followed him through almost the whole of his repertory, and become familiar, not only with

his admirable powers as a dramatic singer, but with his force as an actor. This, it is true, moves in a restricted circle, partly owing perhaps to his physical conformation. In all characters requiring demeanour he fails, though he treads the stage well for one so under-sized. The elegant vivacity, the gentlemanly composure of the Chevalier, are beyond his reach; his "Robert," therefore, is rough, irritable, uncourtly; his worst acted part. In "Masaniello," on the other hand, he is admirable; the fire of the South is in every glance and gesture — the *lazzi* of the fisherman, and the elevation of the popular leader, are admirably combined. There is a deep, but irascibly jealous tenderness in all his intercourse with his sister, which is in the highest style of art; and the sudden outburst of peasant exultation when, paraded in the Viceroy's robe, and on the Viceroy's charger, he recognises his old comrades of the mole and the market, becomes absolutely touching when the future is adverted to, — and it is remembered that the simple-hearted man is rejoicing in the purple and fine

linen of his new estate, upon the crumbling verge of Conspiracy and Death.

Another part in which Duprez is admirable must be here also commemorated, as I shall forbear to expatiate at length upon the opera which it distinguishes, — I mean "La Juive" of M. Halévy.

Those who are familiar with the English versions of the story, will remember that M. Scribe, by placing a coarse Shylock more directly than his prototype in the way of the persecutions which the Princes of Europe so unworthily heaped on the Israelite, and by giving to the Jew of Constance a daughter, — no shrewish Jessica, but a resolved, passionate, pensive maiden, who is unlawfully sought by the Emperor's son, — has wrought up a drama strong enough in the fibre of interest to bear being entirely stripped of its music. They will remember, too, that the Jew's vengeance upon his persecutors, when the disclosure of this love-secret exposes both to a cruel law, takes the terrible form of his acquiescing in the martyrdom of the innocent Rachel, because she is not his

daughter, but the long-lost child of the peasant Cardinal de Brogny. In retaliation, Eleazar puts the haughty churchman on the rack, by throwing out hints that a secret lies in his keeping; and, finally, by revealing it at the moment when the flames of the caldron, decreed by the father, close over his child! Fierce and frightful though this story be, as affording scope for dramatic situation, there are few like it in the library of opera books: — and I have never listened to the flat and elaborately-pretending music to which it is mated, without wishing that a story as enthralling in power had fallen under the treatment of him who so passionately rendered the agonies of the grave-digging scene in "Fidelio," — or even into the less vigorous hands of the composer of "Guillaume Tell." Now that the prodigal splendours of its processions and caparisons and town-scenes are somewhat faded, and that the Parisian public, for national glory's sake, has consented to swallow the dry science and frivolous melody of M. Halévy, — "La Juive" maintains its place by the strong interest of its story, and the striking

vivacity with which the singer has converted an opera skeleton into a character. There is the history of a tribe in the very timid cat-like step with which the Pariah of Constance creeps down the stage; cringing into a malicious dwarfishness as he approaches the magnificent portal of the Cathedral, and casting quick uneasy glances of mock humility among the holyday keepers of the town, lest any should eye his beautiful daughter too rudely. But when I am speaking of Duprez as an actor, I would particularly allude to the great scene of the fourth act,— the one in which the regret-stricken Cardinal seeks his prisoner, then under sentence of torture and death, to gain tidings of the child he has never forgotten. It is now the Jew's turn. The oppressor is to be oppressed, the torturer to be tortured. Every furrow traced by cunning on a forehead, old but not venerable, is changed into a malicious wrinkle. The eyes, with a triumphant and tantalising significance, pierce to the inmost heart of the bereaved father: the lean clenched fingers tremble, as if the avenging knife and the

"pound of flesh" were in their clutch; the form dilates as with a tiger-like restlessness the usurer of emotion prowls round and round his august suppliant,—secure that neither rack nor fire can wring from him the ecstasy of revenge! If he show a willingness, for one moment, to barter the tidings closely locked within him for his own life and liberty, it is but to torture the Cardinal with false hopes. Painfully does the music labour through the passion of this scene; but I have never seen it given by Duprez, never watched his elastic and stealthy footsteps, and the gleam of his cruel malignant eyes, without extricating myself from the melo-dramatic rhyme of Scribe, and the dull platitudes of M. Halévy, and listening to that wonderful climax of vindictive determination which Shakspeare put into Shylock's mouth, — "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? — revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? — why, revenge. The villany you teach me I

will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction!"

Once only have I heard Duprez sing any of the Italian music, by the study and execution of which he has made his style so much more richly vocal than most of his French predecessors. This was the third act of "Otello," which he went through with Mademoiselle Pauline Garcia on a benefit night. In spite of the drawbacks of a lazy orchestra, and of his being associated in scenes of such intense power with a Desdemona whose genius is not as yet seconded by her physical strength, this, too, was a noble performance. "Though slackening the *tempo* a little more than is admissible," says a note in a journal of 1840, made immediately after the performance was over, "Duprez more nearly satisfied me than any Otello I have ever seen: for he is twice the vocalist that Donzelli was, though far less magnificently gifted by nature. His recitative was wonderful. I tried to fill out the other part of the dialogue by calling up Pasta. His acting, too, was superb. It was the restlessness of one tormented

by a guilty purpose, rather than the sacrificial sternness of him whom wrong and revenge have turned to stone or iron! In the murder scene, the manner in which he screened himself behind the chair, as though Guilt were seeking protection from its own horrid thoughts, was fearful. There was something sanguinary and Moorish in the whole performance, which gave the part, to me, quite a new colour. I shall never forget, too, a face among the audience, which, turning round for one moment, I caught, fixed on the stage, and in admirable keeping with the scene. It belonged to one of the royal family of Spain in the box close behind us — a Velasquez portrait stiff from its frame. She was a young fair girl, with *blue blood* in every feature, and a haughtiness in her formal, upright attitude, strange and startling in one so young. Her square impassive mouth was closed with a quiet and stern decision, nothing short of fearful. One could fancy such a presence overlooking an *Auto-da-fé*, without its young owner testifying either pity or aversion!"

With all these high artistic excellencies, and

though confessedly more profitable to the treasury of his theatre than any one singer has ever been before, Duprez is nevertheless not the favourite of cultivated Paris that Nourrit was. He is more of a singer — less of an universal artist. Besides suffering most unjustly from a certain feeling of disapproval on the part of the public, as if he had been the cause of the tragical fate of his predecessor, — he is less popular than Nourrit in the green-room, where report declares him to be tenacious and disobliging, — less intimately moulded into the creeds and coteries of Young France. He sings requiems, but professionally — and not at an Abbé Chatel's church. The *feuilletonists* are beginning to be a little weary of his supremacy; one or two of them have personal reasons to ostracise him, and do so accordingly with all the *finesse* which the gentlemen of the French press know how to use so cuttingly. For instance, the withdrawal of the art-opera of M. Berlioz, "Benvenuto Cellini," has been laid to his door, and not to the utter incomprehensibility of its music. Le Journal des Débats, therefore, has become

his covert enemy. M. Jules Janin, who with his left hand owns that he understands nothing about Music, while with his right he throws off the most delicate and fanciful rhapsodies of no-meaning on such imaginative works as the "Romeo and Juliet Symphony" of M. Berlioz, has more than once held the singer up to condemnation as one whose views are narrow and selfish, and who would betray his art (to imitate the writer's own phraseology) "for ten pieces." More recently still, the unsuccessful composer himself has aimed a dart in the same direction, under the pretext of a *feuilleton* in Le Journal des Débats upon theatricals in general. In the positions laid down by M. Berlioz there is so much enlarged sense, that, not inquiring how far the case to which they refer illustrates them, or otherwise, I can hardly do better than close this sketch of the finest tenor singer I have encountered on the stage, by translating a few passages: —

"Let it be said that the number of dramatic situations is limited: we know it. Ingenuity, invention, genius even, can only vary their

combination by disguising, more or less, the physiognomy of their details. We have nothing left but to resign ourselves to this fact.

" The art of Music is much richer by reason of its youth, its great complexity, above all, of the unlimited liberty which has been fiercely denied to it for centuries, but which Nature herself could not fail to give it, sooner or later, and which it has gained to-day. The complete emancipation of Music is as recent as incontestable. Even the public has accepted it, and towards Music that public with confidence turns for those fresh and powerful emotions which it has no longer to expect from the other arts, and for which its thirst becomes stronger and stronger.

" That confidence, however, is now failing. Is it to become utterly extinct? If we advance, is Art to remain immovable? What holds it back? One might answer, the timidity, perhaps excusable, of ministers who mistrust the success of too daring innovations, — or the rarity of those pioneer-artists who are courageous enough to dare for awhile to walk alone, strong enough to

open a new path, persevering enough to beckon after them the multitude, and to make no reply to its reproaches, nay, even to its injuries when fatigued, save by promising them that rare discoveries are at hand: —sagacious enough not to lose their way, and to keep their eyes fixed on their guiding-star, however distracting be the other lights of Heaven. What holds Art back? The servants who do its will; who are for ever ready to heap the reproach of bitterness and feebleness upon the new productions submitted to them: yet, by a strange contradiction, are not the less armed with a blind and instinctive severity against any thing presenting to them unknown forms, new shades of colour, difficulties to be overcome — the fruits of reflection, labour, and talent. What holds Art back? Above all things, the overweening ambition of certain singers: they behold in it nothing but gold and garlands; and the means most certain to procure these readily are the only ones they will employ. They have remarked that certain melodic formulas, certain vocal exercises, certain arbitrary

terminations — certain insignificant rhythms, have the property of calling down instantly such applause as constitutes a more than sufficient reason for desiring their introduction: — nay, for demanding it, in every part, in defiance of all respect for expression, or thought, or dignity of style; a reason, on the other hand, for despising all productions more independently and loftily conceived. They know the effect of the old means which they employ habitually; they do not know the effect of those proposed to them; and, not considering themselves as disinterested witnesses in the question, abstain from them as much as possible, in doubtful cases. Already the weakness of certain composers, who have satisfied their exactions, has encouraged them to dream of introducing into our theatres the musical customs of Italy: but at this end they will not arrive.

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"Nothing, however, is stranger than the unmeasured and scarcely credible increase of the importance granted to certain singers, as compared with that which it has been dared

to refuse to the composers. I blush to enter into such details; but since every thing in theatrical matters resolves itself into an affair of money, they ought to be well understood, for the interest of art, of administration, and, lastly, of the artists themselves, who have every thing to lose in the ruin of the theatres.

" In the time of Louis Quatorze, who created L'Académie Royale, when the principal artists had an annual revenue of four thousand *francs*, the author's share, for a grand composition, was a hundred *francs*. At present, this same share, for the first forty representations, has mounted to two hundred and fifty *francs :* and if it had kept pace with the monstrous increase of which we have a specimen in the salary of one hundred thousand *francs*, now received by Duprez (for instance), it should have reached two thousand five hundred *francs ;* — a sum entirely incompatible with the expenses necessary to the execution in the stage arrangement of the most meagre opera.

" In the instances cited, doubtless, we have

an unique example of vocal fortune *; but it excites and keeps alive, among all the other artists, hopes and ambitions in proportion to the gifts which each one, in reality or fancy, possesses. If the first tenor has one hundred thousand *francs* — why not the second, fifty? From thence to the absurd, to the impossible, there is only one step.

"If we divide these enormous sums into fragments, we shall arrive at a curious result.

"The first tenor, with his salary of one hundred thousand *francs*, plays about seven times every

* A notice or two on the comparative payment of French tenor singers is not here out of place. A hundred years ago, in 1738, Geliotte, the tenor of the Grand Opera, had a fixed salary of twelve thousand *livres*, three hundred *livres* of annual gratuity, and about five or six hundred *livres* of extraordinary gratuities. These sums were gradually augmented to a fixed salary of three thousand *francs*, with ordinary and extraordinary gratuities of two thousand more. In 1812, Elleviou, who was the favourite at the Opera Comique, and received a salary of eighty-four thousand *francs*, demanded that the sum should be increased to one hundred and twenty thousand; which being denied at Napoleon's express instance, he retired from the theatre.

month; consequently, eighty-four times every year: and hence receives a little more than eleven hundred *francs* (44*l.*) for each performance. Now, if we suppose that a part consists of eleven hundred notes, or syllables, that will be at the rate of a *franc* a syllable. Thus, in 'Guillaume Tell'—

"Ma (1 *franc*), presence (3 *fr.*), pour vous est peut-être un outrage (9 *fr.*).

"Mathilde (3 *fr.*), mes pas indiscrets (100 *sous*).

"Ont osè jusqu'a vous se frayer un passage! (13 *fr.*)

"Total, 34 *francs*. This is talking gold with a vengeance!

"It must be honestly owned, that if it be pleasant to have our joke in this style, the gods and goddesses of song have their money's worth for it.

"But while we laugh, the theatres pay; and they pay so much, that, one fine day, finding their treasuries empty, they will, every one, shut their doors; and these divinities will be reduced to give lessons in *solfeggio*, (such, that is, as can,)

or to sing in the public streets with a guitar, four candle ends, and a green baize. Then, perhaps, may the musical edifice be reconstructed on a basis more solid: for neither art nor manners can suffer its utter destruction."

Fine raillery and sound reason! — but Duprez has the throne. Long may it be ere failure of voice or diminution of energy give raillery or reason the power of compelling him to yield it to a successor, — that he may, in his turn, be lamented and deified by the journalists and composers of Paris, as Nourrit has been!

CHAP. VII.

THE MASTERPIECE OF FRENCH OPERA — "LES HUGUENOTS."

Morning in old Paris. — First Introduction to "Les Huguenots." — M. Vèron and "La Juive." — Spectacle. — Feelings and Furniture. — Brilliant Scenery. — The Subject of "Les Huguenots" foretold in the Grimm and Diderot Correspondence. — Anticipated by Lee and Purcell. — Other English Anticipations. — Why "Les Huguenots" is the Masterpiece of French Opera. — Its Purpose. — George Sand's Letter to Meyerbeer. — Limits of Character-Music. — *Marcel* and the *Corale*. — *Valentine* and Mademoiselle Falcon. — The latter's melancholy Story. — True Character of the Music of "Les Huguenots." — Its *Solos* thoroughly French. — Its Choruses. — Sketch of the first — second — third Acts. — The Septuor. — The fourth Act. — "*Le Benediction des Poignards.*" — The Grand Duet. — Respective Limits of Opera and Tragedy. — The closing Scenes. — Conclusion.

I HEARD "Les Huguenots" for the first time on the third evening of my first visit to Paris, — after a long morning spent in the indulgence of that eager appetite for sight-seeing which only

confinement and inexperience can give. I had been exploring every corner of Notre Dame, and watching, with the curiosity of a newly-imported Englishman, a gipsy girl dancing in the Parvis with a crowd of picturesque figures round her, just where Esmeralda danced! And I had been roaming through the labyrinths of that strange building, the Palais de Justice, with its grim towers, and its spacious law courts, its exquisite Sainte Chapelle, and its long arcades where Law and Merchandise make so odd a mosaic, and where the *grisette* composedly tying her garters (as I saw her) on the step of a *modiste's* door, must abide the risk of being run down by some breathless advocate, with all the importance and hurry and twice the noise of the haunters of Chancery Lane and Westminster Hall.

Such a pilgrimage was certain to leave me bewildered by its novelty, and excited by thick-crowding associations to that point at which all first impressions of any work of art become indistinct and are worth little. To be honest, too, on the evening in question, I was staring

at the stage, rather than listening to it; and with good cause.

"Les Huguenots" was the last successful production of the operas combining the talents of Mademoiselle Falcon, Madame Dorus-Gras, MM. Nourrit and Levasseur, which so brilliantly illustrated the reign of M. Vèron. He understood, if ever did mortal manager, not only his public, but how to present a succession of works, which should impress either by the force of their music, or their dramatic interest, or their *spectacle*. To the "Robert" of Meyerbeer succeeded Auber's "Gustave," with its pretty music, its more than pretty third act, and its sumptuous masquerade scene: — to Auber's "Gustave," "La Juive," by M. Halévy. "*Bah!*" exclaimed an atrabilious critic in spectacles, whom one day, in the concert room of the Rue Bergere, I chanced to hear making so free with all the celebrities of Paris, that there was no mistaking his being a neglected composer — "*Bah!* as to 'La Juive,' 'tis an opera for the eyes! All Paris came to look at the scenery and the armour, and at the Em-

peror eating the golden apple; and so it ended in all Paris fancying that M. Halévy was a second Beethoven! Vèron could have crammed any thing down. If he had brought out the 'Guido *,' for instance, instead of Duponchel, that would have been a success! What a plague scene he would have given us, with all the dead bodies lying about the stage, — and *such* an orgie!"

But as a pageant, "Les Huguenots," though less glittering than "La Juive" must have been when first produced, has more than enough to content the most exacting eye. Those fare ill, I suspect, with a certain class of critics, who own themselves to be fascinated by the miracles which a scene-painter and a stage-tailor can work; but to write of the French Opera, and omit all mention of "MM. Sechan, Feuchères, Dieteste, et Desplechin," would be as absurd as to forget Grisi's sumptuous beauty in enumerating her gifts and graces. I have heard one of the liveliest of modern authoresses, no less brilliant in her told than in her written

* An opera, the scene and time of which are those of The Decameron — of which more in a later page.

anecdotes, describe a manuscript once submitted to her by an unfortunate novelist, which was intended to be a tale of thrilling interest. This was produced in an original fashion. So often as a great scene recurred, the author would describe the fair Sabina as reclined "on a gilt sofa, covered with crimson velvet, with six elbow chairs and two ottomans to match, plunged in the deepest sorrow," or the faithful Orlando as "rushing to her rescue, up a staircase, the balustrade of which was of richly carved oak of the best period, in peculiarly good preservation, and the steps whereof were laid down with tapestry of a unique pattern." The would-be Scott turned out to have served his apprenticeship, to Life as well as to Fiction, in an upholsterer's warehouse! Some such entry of "the arras thus, the pictures thus," rather than of the music, I find in my journal of 1836, after my first night of "Les Huguenots." The morning scene of the cavaliers in the first act, with its crowd of young nobles in courtly dresses, not forgetting the pair playing at chess in the left hand corner, with all the gentlemanly abstraction of

real life, who may be there seen even unto this day; — the rich terrace under the walls and above the moat of Chenonceau, with its imposing flight of steps, down which the court of Marguerite is to sweep in all the number and gorgeousness of a real court procession; — the third act in the Prè aux Clercs, with its apparently countless multitude of people; — the gay bridal procession of the ill-starred Valentine; — the arm waving a wild torch out of the upper window of the *cabaret*, when the fray between Catholics and Protestants breaks out; — Queen Margaret, on her white palfrey (not forgetting that property of Queen Elizabeth, on which M. Puff laid so much stress, to wit, her side-saddle); — the throng of Bohemian dancers in their little scarlet caps and black *plumes de coq*, — and the illuminated gondola which glides in "with harp, and pipe, and symphony," to bear the bride to the arms of her unloved lord and master: — I find all these things, I say, journalized in precedence of the grand septuor, or the magnificent fourth act. To this day, I cannot lose the sense of their splendid

pertinence and aid as accessories indispensable to the effect; for Meyerbeer's master work, to be enjoyed as it deserves, demands not only the execution, but also the pomp of the Parisian stage. And I cannot but wish that every one of my countrymen, who has any concern in the re-establishment of our lyric drama, would take a journey to Paris, for the express purpose of seeing what may be done, whether as regards musical combinations, or managerial preparations, in the masterpiece of French Opera.

It is curious to find the practicabilities of the subject of "Les Huguenots" engaging the attention of the critics and wits in France, seventy years ago. In a letter "on the composer Monsigny, the French Opera, and the Encyclopedie," published in the "Correspondence inédite de Grimm et Diderot," — after many shrewd and sensible remarks on the characteristics of the Grand Opera of Paris, and the mixture it contains of dancing with singing, to which the writer strongly objects, — "Remark," says he, "that the dance may be historical in any piece, as well as the song. Give me a sublime genius, and I

will show you Catherine de Medicis making her preparations for the massacre of St. Bartholomew, in the midst of the festivals and dances of the marriage of the King of Navarre. Such a contrast between apparent tranquillity and the tempest of crime brewing, such a mixture of gallantry and cruelty, if I know the art of moving, would make you shudder to the bone; but do not fear your ever being able to see any thing of the kind on the stage of the Opera." Fifty years earlier than this, our own grandiloquent Nat Lee had availed himself of the subject for his tragedy, "The Massacre of Paris," which probably owed its origin to a more ancient play by Marlowe; and among the other scenic compositions of our greatest dramatic composer, Purcell, not the least excellent is the bass song, "Thy Genius, lo!" given to the monitory Spirit, who hovers over the couch of Charles IX. when he is vexed by remorse for the crime to which he has consented. There are points in Lee's play — in particular, a scene at the commencement of the third act betwixt the Queen Mother and Marguerite — which possibly may have suggested

situations to that master of stage transformation, M. Scribe. Indeed, our English dramatists and legend-mongers, old and recent, have furnished a contingent to the French romanticists, large enough to surprise those who believe all our stage-plots are taken from the French; or, if not furnished, have anticipated some of their best subjects. "Masaniello," for instance, was treated in 1651 *, "by a gentleman who was himself a witness in the whole of the Rebellion of Naples" — and again in 1700, by Tom Durfey. Auber's "Lac de fees" was anticipated by the tale of the Man and the Mermaid, in Crofton Croker's faëry legends — in itself an Irish version of the more graceful Arabian story, Hassan el Básrah. That humorous scene in "The Picture" of Massinger, where the chaste and noble Sophia entraps and confines in a tower Ricardo and Ubaldo, the coxcombical and bragging Iachimos of the court of Hungary, has been prettily reproduced on a miniature scale in "La Quenouaille de Barberine," one of M. Alfred de Musset's graceful cabinet comedies.

* See the "Companion to the Playhouse." 1764.

Not to be tedious, however, in enumerations, — "Les Huguenots" deserves, dramatically, as well as musically, the title I have given it. It unites in itself the most striking features of the *chefs d'œuvre* of French Opera. There is a touch in it of the chivalry and romance, and of the mystic enthusiasm of the "Robert;" there is the strong interest of "La Juive" in its story, and a like magnificence in its scenic pomps. Like "Guillaume Tell," it is at once a national and a historical opera; a local colour has been given to some of its scenes — witness the opening to the third act, with the revelry of the Clercs de la Basoche, and the Catholic litanies to the Virgin, the song of Coligni's soldiers, and the simple but impressive "*couvre feu*," in the Prè aux Clercs. Not a single element of contrast or colour seems to have escaped Meyerbeer. His opera, too, is to be considered as a work with a purpose expressed in music. Among the "Lettres d'un Voyageur" of George Sand is one addressed to the composer, meeting and amplifying his idea with such eloquent ingenuity, that I am too glad to

offer an imperfect paraphrase of it, in place of my own dimmer, though coincident, guesses at the subject. The date of the letter is Geneva; and after some sarcastic remarks upon the pulpit oratory of that town, — the occasion being a sermon as distasteful as most sermons at all dogmatically precise are to George Sand, — she thus continues, contrasting the "Robert" with its successor, in her own eloquent and characteristic manner: —

"When the nave was no longer filled with those impassive faces on whose forehead Lavater could only have written this one single word, '*Formality*,'— when those paternal and prosaic remonstrances of the nasal preacher had died away, — Reform, that mighty idea, which has neither emblem, nor veil, nor mystic ornaments, appeared to me in its bare and simple grandeur. That church, without tabernacle or sanctuary, those windows, where the sun shone through no painted glass, those wooden benches, where all are equal, — at least at prayer-time,— those chill and naked walls; —that aspect of order, in short, which appeared as if but yesterday it had

been established in a devastated Catholic church by severe military installation, impressed me with feelings of respect and sadness. Here and there a pelican or a chimæra — vestige of the ancient faith—was twined in an attitude of pain and imprisonment round the capital of a column. The vaults were neither Papist nor Huguenot. Lofty and deeply-arched, they appeared made to receive aspirations to Heaven of every tone, to echo the prayer and the invocation, into whatever form their burden might be cast. From the stones beneath my feet, never warmed by the knees of a Protestant, there seemed to issue grave voices: the accents of a calm and serene triumph — the sighs of the departing — the murmurs of tranquillity and resignation, of Faith in its last agonies, without the spasms and groans of Death. It was the voice of the Calvinist martyrs — martyrs without trance or ecstasy — whose sufferings were stifled by an austere pride and a solemn assurance in the future.

" It was natural that these imaginary strains should take, in my mind's ear, the form of the beautiful psalm in the opera of ' Les Huguenots;'

and while I fancied, too, that I heard, without, the furious cries and the close firing of the Catholics, a tall figure passed before mine eyes — one of the noblest figures of Drama — one of the finest personifications of the religious idea which the arts have produced in our time — the Marcel of Meyerbeer. And I saw, face to face, that statue of iron, in its strong buff suit, animated by the breath from above which the composer had bade descend and give it life. I saw it — forgive my presumption, O master spirit! — just as it appeared to yourself when you came to seek it, in the open and courageous hours of noon*, among the aisles of some Protestant temple, as wide and as bright as these. O musician! who are more of a poet than any of us, in what unknown hiding-place of your soul, in what secret treasury of your intelligence, did you discover those bold and distinct features, that conception simple as antiquity, true as history, transparent as conscience,

* It is a garish, broad, and peering day;
Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears.
Shelley.

strong as faith? You, who were so lately on your knees in the voluptuous recesses of Saint Marc's, in fancy building on yet more magnificent proportions that Sicilian cathedral of yours, steeping yourself in the incense of Catholicism at that mysterious hour when the light of the just kindled tapers gleams upon the gold and marble walls, — yielding yourself up to be seized and swayed by the tender and awful emotions of that holy place — how, then, could you, on entering the temple of Luther, thus evoke its stern poesy — thus call to life its heroic dead? We believed your soul to be as anxious and as timid as the soul of Dante, when led onward through Hell and Paradise by his genius, it was awe-struck or melted at every step he took. You had stolen the secret of the invisible choirs, at the moment when, on the elevation of the Host, the angels wrought in mosaic by Titian spread their wide and dusky wings on that firmament of Byzantine gold, upborne above the kneeling multitude. You had pierced the impenetrable silence of the tombs, and far down beneath the shuddering floor of the cathe-

dral you had caught the bitter wailings of the condemned, and the threats of the angels of darkness. You had possessed yourself of the profound meaning — the sublime sadness of these gloomy and grotesque allegories. Between the Angel and the Demon, between the fantastic Heaven and Hell of the Middle Ages, you had seen Man divided against himself, parted betwixt the flesh and the spirit, dragged towards the annihilation of debauchery, but protected by a life-giving intelligence, and saved by divine hope. You had painted this strife, these terrors, these pangs, these promises, this enthusiasm, in grave and impressive forms, leaving them still enveloped in the symbolical poetry which surrounded them. You had known how to trouble and to move us by the agency of beings of the fancy, and of impossible situations. And this because a man's heart must beat in the artist's bosom — a heart bearing the burning impress of real life; and this because true Art gives to every thing a significance, and the soundest philosophy and the gentlest human

sympathies must preside over the most brilliant caprices of genius.

* * * * *

That fine contest between audacious doubt and desperate courage, in the midst of those mystical yearnings and those enthusiastic aspirations towards the saints and angels which was prefigured in the "Robert," had already strongly demanded in you the finest combination of different powers, the most vivid understanding of the transformations of Man's thought and religious character. It has been said concerning 'Les Huguenots,' that its music is neither Protestant nor Catholic; which is identical with saying that the canticles of Luther, which they sing in Germany, have not a different character from the Gregorian chants of the Sistine chapel. As if Music were merely an arrangement of sounds, better or worse combined to tickle the ear, and the mere measure applicable to any dramatic situation sufficed for the expression of the emotions and passions of the lyric drama! * * * For myself, I will remain convinced, that it is in the

power of the fairest of the arts to paint every shade of sentiment, every phase of passion. Waiving metaphysical dissertations, there is nothing Music cannot express. For the description of the scenes of Nature she has ideal lines and colours which are neither minute nor precise, but are all the more vaguely and deliciously poetical. More exquisite and of wider scope than the loveliest painted landscape, does not Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony open to the imagination an enchantment of fair prospects, a whole valley of the Engadine, a terrestrial paradise, where the spirit may wander away, leaving behind her and seeing arise before her illimitable horizons — skies where the tempest is born, triumphs, and sinks to silence— from which the bird sings and the dew glistens on the forests — scenes where the bruised heart expands, where body and soul are re-vivified, and, one with Nature, enjoy her delicious repose?"—

* * * * *

"Tell me how, upon a few stanzas of insignificant rhyme, you were able to construct characters of such an individuality, to create

beings of the first order, where the author of the *libretto* has placed only accessory personages? Is not your old serving man, so rude, so intolerant,—as faithful to friendship as the Deity himself, in war cruel, contemptuous, irritable, a fanatic in cold blood, and tranquilly sublime in the hour of martyrdom — is not he the type of Lutheranism, in the whole extent of its poetical sense, in the whole acceptation of the true Ideal — of the artistic Real — that is, in all possible perfection? And that tall dark maiden, courageous even to enterprise,— in her passion so enthusiastically disdainful of the world, nay, of death itself, exchanging the fanaticism of Catholicism for the beatitude of Protestant martyrdom — is not she a figure, in her energy, in her generosity, worthy of a place by the side of Marcel? To Nevers, again, — that gallant young gentleman so exquisite in vest and buskin, who, in the *libretto*, has some four words to say, — you have known how to give a grace and elegance and chivalry which make one love him in spite of his coxcombry, while he utters, in charming melody, his delicate distress,

(I speak of the spirit of the music, not the letter of the text,) — 'It would be impossible for any one to believe the extent to which I am every day persecuted!'

"Save in the two last acts the character of Raoul, with all your skill, is unable to rise from the weight of commonplace insipidity with which M. Scribe has laden it. Even Nourrit's true sensibility and rare intelligence contended in vain against the sentimental and silly nonentity of the hero, who is 'a thorough victim of circumstances,' as the romance writers phrase it. But how the part rises in the fourth act — how it *tells* in the great scene, which (prudery and objection put aside) I find so pathetic, so intensely mournful, so fearful,— so any thing rather than anacreontic! What a duet! What a dialogue! How has the musician wept, implored, raved, and conquered, where the author should have done it! O master! you are a noble dramatic poet, an arch-romancer! I give your Page over to the critics; placed in a position so ungracious as his, he could not have been more significant: but I

defend against the world your last trio — that inimitable scene, broken up and fragmentary, it is true; but because the situation demands it — because you would not have there *the musician's music* or *the author's music*, but, instead of these, the music of genuine passion and probable action, — music where the melody does not strive against the situation, nor insist upon a regular *cavatina* with the established *Coda* and passage as indispensable to the hero who falls, pierced with wounds, on the stage!"

Enthusiastic, intelligent, and strikingly poetical as this rhapsody is, I confess that, on reflection, I do not find the delineation of character to be so forcible or so felicitous in Meyerbeer's work, as in the brilliant fragment I have cited. As regards Marcel's Lutheranism, for instance, the composer's manner of working seems to me analogous to that of certain writers who have presented eccentrics on the stage, or in fiction, on the strength of a catch-word continually recurring: — a snuffled "yea," or "brother," repeated without stint, standing for a Quaker: — a few Scripture phrases repre-

senting the stout old Puritans, and a "Sith" or "By our bright lady," the Elizabethan Euphuist. Thus tried, the old servitor becomes not so much an embodied thought as a melody on two legs! In most cases his coming is indicated by the same psalm tune; which, as we know it be one of Luther's, must of course denote him to be a Lutheran. But elsewhere the expression of his creed as distinguished from the rough superstition of any other old swordsman, seems to me to reduce itself to one Huguenot troll — the rugged "Pif, Paf!" in the first act, and to a few bars in the first *finale;* and even in both these passages, to depend upon the words rather than on the music. The *costume*, if I may use such a term, which a peculiar belief throws over the thoughts and utterances of a man's life, is perhaps beyond the power of music to render, save by association, as in the case of the *corale* mentioned. The heroine Valentine, again, whom George Sand sees so clearly rising from the musician's magic caldron, — I suspect to be not so entirely a phantom of Meyerbeer's evoking, but that she owes

something of life and colour to the enthusiastic author's remembrance of her first representative; I mean the ill-starred Mademoiselle Falcon, the loved and the lost one of L'Académie.

She, indeed, was a person to haunt even a passing stranger. Though the seal of her race was upon her beauty, and it wore the expression of a Deborah or a Judith, rather than of a Melpomene, I have never seen any actress, who in look and gesture so well deserved the style and title of the Muse of Modern Tragedy. Large, dark, melancholy eyes, — finely-cut features, — a form, though slight, not meagre, — and, above all, an expressiveness of tone rarely to be found in voices of her register, which was a legitimate *soprano*, — the power of engaging interest by mere glance and step when first she presented herself, and of exciting the strongest emotions of pity, or terror, or suspense, by the passion she could develope in action — such were her gifts. Add to these the charms of her youth, the love borne to her by all her comrades; — and the loss of her voice, followed by the almost desperate efforts made by her to recover it, and her dis-

astrous final appearance when no force of will could torture destroyed Nature into even a momentary resuscitation,—make up one of those tragedies into which a fearful sum of wrecked hope and despair and anguish enters. Hers is a history, if all tales are true, too dark to be repeated, even with the honest purpose, not of pandering to an evil curiosity, but of pointing out the snares and pitfalls which lie in wait for the *artiste*, and of inquiring, for the sake of Art as well as of Humanity (the two are inseparable), if there be no protection against them, — no means for their avoidance?

In my poor judgment the music of "Les Huguenots" is rather the music of situation and passion, than of character. But while situation and passion are here treated with a certain originality, the thing is still done in accordance with the statutes of the French stage. There are none of those long solitary scenes in which the singer exhales the "*speranza*" or "*dolore*" or "*rabbia*" of an Italian opera. The greater part of the *solo* music takes the form of the couplet; the airs are nearly all of

them airs of narration, and not of sentiment. Even the song of Marguerite at the commencement of the second act, confessedly an *aria d'agilita* and not partaking of the above character, is so richly sustained by three *soprano* voices, as to receive an interest beyond any mere unaccompanied *solfeggio*, even should a singer as brilliant and daring as Madame Dorus-Gras execute it. On the other hand, the quantity of choral and dialogue music in "Les Huguenots" is enormous; for Meyerbeer, restrained by no pity for his executants, by no tradesmanlike wish to conciliate minor theatres, where three respectable singers at most are the amount of vocal force available, has inwrought in all his scenes very nearly as many secondary characters as do their spiriting in one of Shakspeare's historical plays. While these masses of sound, and the slight opportunity for display which it is in the power of any mere vocalizer to find in "Les Huguenots," remove it beyond the Italian pale, the stricter Germans reject it for the conventional *cut* of its airs, for the triteness of some of their leading ideas,

and for the utter disdain of continuity in working out his subjects shown by the master. The changes of *tempo*, as I have already observed, are innumerable and wanton: a few bars of some new movement being again and again thrust in, whenever it is necessary to bring back a *ritornello*, or to accomplish a close. That such breaking of bounds is not necessary to the development of the boldest inspirations, we have a proof in Beethoven's conduct of the vault-scene, in his "Fidelio," and in Weber's *finale* to the second act of "Euryanthe;" two of the strongest instances of dramatic effect extant. Artifice, in short, could hardly go further than in this opera, without entirely demolishing all the forms of Art, or becoming so unscrupulous as to avail herself of the means which vulgarity and slovenliness use to conceal want of science and want of invention.

But, though Meyerbeer may never found a school of composition, however many be the young hands who throw away the well-accustomed implements of science, and take up ill-fashioned tools of their own invention, in the

hopes of mastering his secret — for effect, there is nothing like "Les Huguenots." By effect, alone, no work is to be judged; but to produce an effect which shall move strongly, there must be genius, if there be not always truth. The manner in which the chorus is used throughout the full five acts of this musical tragedy distinguishes it from most operas I have ever studied. The plot of the drama is absolutely unfolded, not by recitatives and airs, but by the most elaborate concerted pieces. In the first act how delicious is the strain of gay and courtly *badinage* thrown off by the companions of Nevers, when he has withdrawn to receive the *incognita* who has solicited from His Coxcombry an interview; and they find a loop-hole of observation, through which Raoul, the only Huguenot of the party, discovers her to be the lady of his vows! How pressing are the phrases of offered service with which they beset the same bewildered Raoul, when they discover that Queen Marguerite of Navarre sends for him mysteriously by her own page! Animal spirits, gallantry, and courtiership are in every

bar of this music. The second act brings a change of mood. We are in the Queen's pleasaunce at Chenonceau: the Royal Lady herself is there, among her maidens, who now support her song — now abandon themselves to the languid and undulating strains which a summer noon, a smooth-shaven bank, and a basin of glassy waters suggest. The great and characteristic beauty of the Chorus of Bathers — I mean the voluptuously-flowing accompaniment of bassoons — is not, as many in England have guessed it to be, from only knowing it through Thalberg's *fantasia*, a piece of Thalberg's fancy; it is a genuine touch of Meyerbeer-*ism*. To this succeeds the tiptoe apparition of the arch and dainty conductors of the blind-folded Huguenot, who is led into the Queen's presence, to be made, at her bidding, the link of fellowship between Catholics and Protestants, by his being united with the fair unknown he has so long loved in secret. This chorus of the "Bandeau" is a perfect gem in its arch delicacy. Then we have the entrance of the whole court, in all the pride of its magnificence; then

the oath of allegiance. The latter, however, in spite of its being elaborated with all possible care, is still hardly so imposing as Rossini's simpler quartett in a similar situation in "Semiramide," though the Italian has pilfered its subject from the well-known romance "Cari pupille" of Blangini. After this the chorus breaks forth to utter the rage of the Court when Raoul — poisoned by that glance through the treacherous window into the closet of Nevers, and by the railleries of the young Catholic nobles — dashes away the hand so condescendingly offered to him, and refuses to complete the compact; while his servitor uplifts stoutly the old Lutheran hymn of joy at his master being delivered from the fellowship of the idolaters, and the arms of a Philistine Dalilah.

In the third act the chorus is yet more importantly called out. It has to determine scene and time; to paint characteristic groups widely different in class and colour. We have the Sunday evening of old Paris — the dance, the song, the holiday keepers, and the jugglers; the Protestant soldiers drinking to the valour of

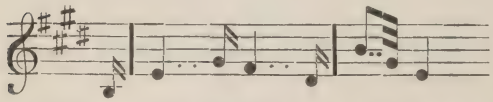
the stout Coligni, and the Catholic girls beseeching the Virgin to bless the bride. The bride is, alas! the luckless Valentine, who, in the moment of outraged pride, consents to marry Nevers, from whose courtesy she had that morning wrung, at the Queen's instance, an abnegation of their compact. Nothing can be more distinctly contrasted than the lusty troll of the Puritans over their cups from the meek litany of the Papist maidens at their prayers, as the one throng to the tavern, and the others move onward to the chapel: and the raciness and freshness of these and of the subsequent Curfew chant, show all the clearer for the re-introduction of the chivalresque spirit of the first act, in the challenge scene which succeeds. Here Raoul, and St. Bris, the father of the insulted Valentine, meet to exchange defiances, each with his two witnesses, and in the presence of Marcel, who would fain stop the combat. The scornful cartel, the quick rejoinder, the adjustment of the laws of fair quarrel, the gradual rising of gallant courage to an outbreak of animation and confidence so bril-

liant, that every voice, as it were, becomes an Excalibur of victory: the whole bold and courteous valour, in short, of the Bassompierres and the Condés of old France, flashes out with a power and a felicity and a nationality not to be resisted. But the quarrel is not thus to circumscribe itself within the bounds of a mortal encounter between two chafed and indignant men: the challenge is but the pebble thrown into a lake ready to be stirred — a watchword to call Catholics and Protestants to a *melée*. The double chorus immediately following this admirable septuor, where the two bands swarm upon the scene, is one of the most solid as well as effective pieces of writing which Meyerbeer has completed. The men uttering stormy menaces, the women with shrill and spiteful taunts exasperating their husbands and brothers to the strife, so poignantly attack, interrupt, overshout, and over-scold each other, that even while following the most meagre transcript of the music, Imagination can hardly but see an angry multitude ripe for one of those frightful tumults which begin among a handful of men, and end

in the spectacle of cities "flaming fast to death," and blood for water running down the streets. Suspense could be hardly carried further than at the moment where the appearance of Queen Marguerite abruptly enforces, for the moment, silence and order. Perhaps the extreme frivolity of the mere pageant-music which closes the act was purposely designed, that the eye might carry on the story, and the ear repose itself for the sterner excitements which are to come.

Of the chorus in the fourth act it is very difficult to speak, so colossal and overpowering is its effect. The unwilling bride is devoured by sorrow: her old and now desperate lover has forced himself into her presence, having too late learned the mistake which has wrecked their happiness. She will not hear him: — she has not time to bid him fly — steps approach — he is to be concealed. Scarcely has she closed the tapestry over his hiding-place — pale and breathless — when her severe and bigoted father enters, with other Catholic noblemen. They come to arrange the midnight massacre of

St. Bartholomew's eve, and to apportion to each his part — the gallant Nevers alone refusing to embrace the scheme, and for this being put in arrest by St. Bris, his father-in-law. The music, up to this point, is fairly dramatic; especially a dark and busy strain given to the leader of the plot; — though the leading idea of the concerted piece

 &c.

be not of the newest; and though the composer, in place of working it out, has contented himself by a simple repetition of it at intervals. There is a slight pause after Nevers is withdrawn. Three monks enter, pale, ruthless, solemn; the angels of Doom pronouncing words that glow like the solemn fire of a sacrifice, or anathemas that chill the very blood to hear. Only Handel has surpassed the majesty of their chant, which a contemporary critic imaginatively called "a march over the ashes of their heretic enemies;" as in its awful and stately progress it sweeps along with it the

voices of all the hearers, and bears them forward by a climax as inevitable as the roaring haste of a river nearing a cataract, till the last awful burst of sanguinary enthusiasm, — the last terrible hymn of the ministers of Superstition, who see Heaven in the mounting fire and the gleaming sword. The strain of exultation drops suddenly into the ghastly whispers of secrecy and midnight. It is ended. They are gone to accomplish the vow. What matter, so that a picture like this be called up, if, to produce the last strongest emotion, the composer has but employed the inexpressive theme I have noted, in thrilling unison and with a change of accompaniment? What matter if, for once, skill take the place of idea, so but the result be that breathless excitement to remember which makes the heart throb and the hand tremble?

After such a chorus, what more was possible? The act had still to be finished — and finished by a duet. Never was a composer so taxed with a Pelion's weight of anti-climax as Meyerbeer with the necessity, after such a stu-

pendous effort of combination, of continuing the scene with merely a pair of interlocutors. Nothing but the mightiest dramatic passion could sustain it: and of such character is the interview which follows. The lady convulsed with terror for her unbidden guest's safety, is unable to endure his flight, when that flight must lead him to certain massacre; — the lover is distracted between willingness to remain at her feet and thoughts of his brethren in faith perishing. I cannot altogether take part with those who find this scene shameful. Though long-hoarded Love bursts out, it is forced into utterance by the overmastering pressure of peril and terror; and scarcely has the ear drunk in the momentary ecstasy of Raoul, on hearing the confession that escapes from Valentine in the delirium of eagerness to retain him, when the muffled funereal clanging of the tocsin announces that the slaughter has begun, and that the Huguenot is a craven, who will sigh away his soul when his people are in such jeopardy. The terrible struggle which follows, if filled out with mere language, as would be necessary were it con-

ducted in words alone, must degenerate into melodrame; but to such music as sweeps along with it, the hurricane of passion may be spoken, without the excess of its frenzy giving a shock to the senses. A great master of harmonies and combinations, availing himself of the vagueness of the impressions produced by sounds as compared with those of words, can venture comparatively further than the Poet, and clothe the meagre skeleton of ejaculations and broken sighs with a fulness and a poetry not to be attained in rhyme, without pushing emotion to agony, or action to distortion. If what I have hazarded contain any amount of truth, here is strong ground on which the vigorous creator of the tragic opera may take his stand, dressing the most terrible passion in forms of beauty, and uttering it in symbol — not speech — by the aid of a spirit of living fire spreading wider and soaring higher than any one speaking in a precise form of measured words can do.

The end of the tale is very near. Pass the brief though brilliant ball scene at the opening of the fifth act, with its fine minuet; introduced,

it may be divined, merely by way of relief, and broken off remorselessly by the tidings of the terrible night without. We are now before a gloomy church in the streets of Paris, which are crowded by helpless, terrified widows and orphans, who fly to the altar to pray that Murder find them not out also, or that their deaths may be short. Here comes the young bride widowed — Nevers, that gallant nobleman, her husband, having been numbered as a first victim of massacre; here comes her cavalier, worn, haggard, exhausted, having faced Death, and seen his work, till life has ceased to have any price. Here, too, comes the old serving-man, wounded, but as resolved of spirit as when he first thundered out his "dear psalm tune" at the Moabitish banquet. From within the church is heard the sad and melancholy swell of that same familiar Lutheran hymn; now weak and faltering, for but women and children remain to sing it. There is nothing but death to come; and Valentine is contented to die, — and Raoul, so but he die with her. Kneeling, as it were, upon the edge of the grave,

the two pronounce vows of trust and confidence; while the stern old Marcel, their faithful friend stands betwixt them, jealous that no lingering earthly love may intrude itself, and with a voice as from the depths of the tomb, bidding them pray for a reunion in heaven. Few and simple are the notes of this passage — which, according to Meyerbeer's manner of producing effect, is thrice repeated in an unchanged form. Once more the doleful psalm rises behind the scenes. Without, too, rises another sound, — the march of the men of blood — a ferocious sanguinary strain: their feet are swift as their words are furious, and their aim true. It moves towards the church. A few last feeble notes of supplication — a moment's skirmish — a moment's gleam through the high windows — and all is silence. The martyr three are left; but it is not to despair, still less to entreat mercy. The sound of many harpings that bursts from the orchestra introduces the triumphant "Amen" of Faith with a crown of life in view, and sustained by the revelation of a future, in which there is only bless-

edness. Here, again, the *motivo* is not extraordinary, nor is its vocal treatment rare; but, by some unfelt spell, the height of the situation is maintained; the strain of exalted triumph rolls on, while peals of the quick and ferocious march coming rapidly nearer announce the return of the executioners. Then, for the last time, Valentine, Raoul, and Marcel, uplifting in sublime unison the old Lutheran tune, — once more a Hosanna of Hope and Triumph, — march forward hand in hand to meet their fate. Here are now no idle repetitions for the sake of musical form — here is no dallying with the terror of the final close: one instant more — one last high strain of that hymn drowning the shouts of the blood-stained rabble — a sound of fire-arms — and the whole is consummated!

I have been forced, by the remembrance of these last scenes, out of the line I had traced for myself, — namely, a mere intimation of certain choral effects, which occur in no other operatic work so strikingly as in "Les Huguenots." I have found myself — every note of the music

ringing in my ears as if I was listening to Falcon, Nourrit, and Levasseur — writing as of some real event which I had seen and heard, and not a mere dramatic presentment in a form which some still satirize as too absurdly conventional to be capable of producing the slightest deep emotion. It is too late after such a dream to come back with the lantern-light of small speculation to measure details, and examine peculiarities of structure. How far more gladly than describe such music, would I make Memory play it in the ears of my friend the reader! Little as has been accomplished in this faithful transcript of impressions, I shall be content if any desire be awakened among those who know it not, or have heard it slighted, to study a composition in effect so entirely unapproached as "Les Huguenots." But it should be seen and heard in France; and I can hardly believe that the severest purist, the most earnest admirer of the serener tranquillities of the old school, could *receive* it, (and at least three hearings are necessary to its reception,) and not think a musical pilgrimage to Paris richly requited.

MUSIC AND MANNERS

IN

GERMANY.

THE BRUNSWICK FESTIVAL IN 1839.

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THE BRUNSWICK FESTIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE JOURNEY AND THE REHEARSAL.

Hamburg to Haarburg. — Steam-boat Groups.— German Good Nature. — Haarburg to Soltau. — Bookcase at Soltau. — Celle. — Brunswick. — Its picturesque Features. — The Blauen Engel. — The Egydien Kirche. — Beethoven's Symphony in C minor. — A Word to our own Festival Committees. — Diligence of the Orchestra. — Dr. Mendelssohn Bartholdy. — A Sketch (not personal). — Care in Rehearsal.

I AM not such a hardened traveller as to have ceased to find the first half hour of a solitary journey in a strange country a trifle dreary. If even, moreover, the banks of the Elbe betwixt Hamburg and Haarburg rivalled those of the

same river above Dresden in beauty and variety, they must have looked dismal on the fourth of September, 1839, after a night's storm, which had scattered all the first yellow leaves of the linden trees on the Jungfernstieg, and under clouds hanging low, which presently discharged themselves in a dense chill rain. The deck of the steamer was made untenable by a drove of horses, on their way from the Lubeck fair to Italy ; the little close cabin reeked with tobacco-smoke. I had before me a day and a night's journey through this forbidding weather — Autumn threatening to be as severe in Hanover as Lord Eglintoun found it at Castle Montgomerie — and across the dreariest country in the world, with only Patience and Pantomime to stand my purveyors and interpreters. "What a fool have I been," said I, wistfully calling to mind my own easy chair at home, "ever to think of this Musical Festival at Brunswick !"

But the people of North Germany have a good-natured way with them, which must put the most pertinacious feelings of strangeness and solitude to flight in a wonderfully short

time. When the tobacco wreaths parted in the cabin, a group or two was revealed worth studying. One was made up of a youth and two damsels; the latter travelling through that raw atmosphere with their bare arms undefended, save by the long brown kid gloves of our great-grandmothers — good-humoured sprightly girls, blessed by Heaven with miscellaneous appetites. Their cavalier, who was making love to one or both of them, was yet more noticeable: his gay and daintily-braided tobacco-pouch slung round his neck; his exuberant travelling cap; his waistcoat, which had been of many colours; his trowsers, shapeless enough to make a Pelham inquire if *schneider* be indeed a German word; his huge square seal-ring on not the cleanest of forefingers — not to forget the thousand smirks and smiles and fondlings lavished on the objects of his care — composed a whole characteristic and worthy of note, though insignificant when compared with others of his sex and age I afterwards encountered. I watched, too, with interest of a different quality, a party of fair and stately girls

with their mother, all in deep mourning, and attended by a young gentleman, whose good French and better manners must belong, I was sure, — and I proved to be right, — to a good name also. Then, further to make me feel at home, my travelling difficulties were presently brought to an end in the best of all possible fashions, by my happy fortune in lighting upon an excellent and sociable Strasburgher, who, like myself, wished to avoid the slow and circuitous route of the public conveyance by Lunenburg, and, being bound for Hanover, proposed that we should join company in a *wagon*, and post as far as Celle, or within two or three stages of my destination

The day kept the promise of the morning, and the gray spongy sky and the incessant rain made the damp and barren moors between Haarburg and Celle appear doubly desolate. The very heather looked starved and wretched; the trees as if they had hardly the heart to grow; the few people, too, we encountered were uncouth and squalid. We were detained early in the last stage before reaching Soltau by the

loss of a horse's shoe; and, while waiting for the postillion's return, whom we had sent back to the last posthouse, forth issued from a miserable sod-hut by the wayside, a couple of girls, hooting and screaming, as unkempt, as dirty, as haggard, as were ever two savages — the long loops of black riband which hung from the country caps they wore streaming wildly in the wind. A more unlovely pair never danced round a caldron. Evening was closing in when we reached Soltau. Here that domestic curse, "a great wash" of an enormous stock of linen, busily directed by the daisy-faced landlady, was filling the post-house with soapy steam, — no pleasant atmosphere to breathe on such an afternoon. To crown all, the Maritornes in attendance, an ill-grown slip-shod girl, was entirely driven to her wits' end by the arrival of the young Count and the ladies whom I had admired in the morning. While she clattered to and fro, retarding, instead of preparing, dinner, I was struck by a neat satin-wood bookcase, at the end of the room; and, on examination, was surprised to find it contain a

handsomely bound collection, not merely of the best German classics, — Göthe, Schiller, Herder, Jean Paul, Novalis, and even Schelling, — but our own Byron, Shakspeare, Irving, in their original English, and, I doubt not, Bulwer, for he is every where in Germany. I was oddly reminded of home, too, by coarse prints of the three Georges of England and Queen Charlotte, hanging on the walls, and one or two such large engravings of the Death of Nelson and of the encounters between the British and the French fleets, as still ornament the guest-chambers of our country houses. But a cookery book would have been more to the purpose than these refinements, as far as we were concerned. When, at last, our dinner made its appearance, the soup might have been furnished by the wash-tub, and the *piece de resistance* proved to be a block of pork, terribly salted, and liberally larded, with preserved cherries to help it down — a dish defying even appetites which had been quickened by that penurious thing, a German inn breakfast, and a long raw morning spent on the wastes of Hanover.

It was not till long after midnight that we rattled into Celle, the head-quarters (so the guide-books say) of the pure German language. The town was dead asleep; not a solitary roamer in the streets; not one of those winking tapers in a high window, which, almost at any hour of night, at once tantalise the traveller passing through an English town, and, by sending his fancy to the vigil of nurse by a sick bed, or of sedulous student over his books, or of hard-pressed operative compelled to curtail the period of natural rest, connect him, as it were, with the world within its walls. But there was an air of formal and faded stateliness in what I could see of the streets of Celle, and in the large lofty chambers and wide staircase of the hotel, which we at last succeeded in forcing open, that, tired as I was, interested me, and called up visions of phlegmatic Electors and stiff Electresses on their progresses and parades, such as may be found painted in Dr. Moore's travels. I did not, however, stay to try whether such august scenes and personages would visit my dreams:

for, after extorting a cup of coffee from the blinking waiter, though sorry to shake hands and part from my Strasburg friend, I was glad to be shut up again in my *wagon*, and to be dozing and jolting my way towards Brunswick. Thanks to the excellent posting regulations adopted throughout the whole of North Germany, a child of five years old who knew not a word of the language might cross the country from Hamburg to Cologne with small risk of being cheated, and with the certainty of not being delayed.

We reached Brunswick by half-past eight in the morning. A brighter, more encouraging day never dawned; the sun glittered on the spotlessly bright window panes of that ancient comfortable town, which was already astir with preparations for the Festival. I had often fancied such a collection of picturesque old buildings nodding to each other across the narrow crooked streets, some of them adorned with quaint carvings; here, a small open space adorned with a fountain or a fine old tree darkening with its green luxuriance the face

of some dwelling-house; there, a lofty church, patched and time-stained, with fragments of rich architecture wrought into its walls; but I had never seen any thing of the kind before. Hence it is, I suppose, on the strength of first impression, that I shall all my long life consider that Brunswick has been somewhat unfairly overlooked by tourists, sketchers, and the compilers of guide-books. My travelling friend had recommended me to take up my quarters at the Blauen Engel; and thither I drove accordingly. There are larger hotels in the town — there can be none in any town more civilly kept. The house was clean and cheerful — the attendance excellent. While I was alighting, the waiter apologized for the landlord, who was gone to the rehearsal of "Paulus:" and while setting on the table the capital coffee, bread, and eggs, which, truth to say, I needed, made me so good naturedly *au fait* in all the politics of the "Musik-Feste," that we became the best friends in the world. By the time my pen and ink were unpacked, I felt as if I had been in Brunswick a week at the very least.

I do not add in a grumbling spirit, that it requires North German heartiness to make up for the discomforts of North German lodgement, — to compensate for the box, by way of bed, in which the victim is expected to sleep, — for the ball of feathers, which *will not* cover him, in lieu of sheets, blankets, and counterpane, — for the noisy uncarpeted floor, and the grievously scanty provision of water in his pie-dish and phial — not basin and jug: — but truth is truth.

A walk after breakfast increased my admiration for the cleanliness and quaintly picturesque architecture I have described. To be sure, the first old town in Germany is much like the first figure one eyes when first setting foot on Calais pier, who looks inviting and pleasant, be she even a *poissarde*, coarse, and old, and wrinkled. But, such charity apart, there are beautiful things in Brunswick: among others, a richly-decorated Rathhaus, with those corrupt ornaments, and that heavy pyramidal gable, which seem to be proper to buildings of its order: a few cloister-like arches in the

opposite corner of the place where it stands of the richest Gothic; and close to the Dom-Kirche, where Caroline of England lies buried, a bronze lion, of Byzantine antiquity. The human beings, too, who looked out at the shop doors, or streamed along the streets, in *such* equipages! were singularly comely and prosperous-looking. A few hours' further experience convinced me of their civility and hospitality to strangers. In all that concerned the official arrangements of the Festival, in a desire to accommodate all classes, from the Duke down to his meanest subject, and in patient attention to the comfort of the most obscure stranger, I must insist that the gentlemen of the committee were a model, which might with advantage be imitated at our own provincial entertainments of a similar kind, where a shred of white ribbon at the button-hole, and a wand in the hand, are too often signs that the wearer is licensed to be discourteous, neglectful, and overbearing.

I was lying in the sunshine, after the one o'clock *table d'hôte*, feverish and sleepy, lazily

calling up past festivals and distant faces, when the thread of my musings was cut short by the entrance of a clean civil little boy, with a message from Dr. Mendelssohn, who was then in the Egydien Kirche, superintending the rehearsal. We were there ere I was well awake. The church is but the fragment of a large Gothic building, which has been sorely despoiled of much of its old ornaments by time or violence; and its one good point — height, renders it ineligible for musical purposes. Even then, though it was late in the afternoon, and the rehearsal had been going on with small intermission since the morning, it was three parts full. I arrived in the midst of Beethoven's C minor symphony, just a few bars before the commencement of its glorious final march, which has a strength and a triumph potent enough almost to raise the dead! Had I desired a moment of the strongest possible sensation on first making acquaintance with a German orchestra, it could not have been more completely granted.

The performance fell far short of what it would have been by Dr. Mendelssohn's own band at

Leipsic. At these German, as at our English musical festivals, the orchestra is compounded of unequal materials, being assisted by many persons unused to practise together. Here, too, it was largely amateur. But the effect of the music was nevertheless overcoming! It seems like a heresy to say it, — but if it be true, as Schindler asserts in his recent memoir, that Beethoven did not intend his symphonies to be performed on a large scale, and conceived that the rendering of their finest effects, under such circumstances, was impossible, — then, the master hardly was aware of the extent to which his own ideas were capable of development, or of the majesty they might assume. And thus, too, may Handel never, even in idea, have heard his own "Hallelujah," or the yet more matchless series of choruses in his "Israel." The glory of the symphony was heightened by the lofty arches and long-drawn aisles through which it resounded; and when the thrill and the mustering of blood to the heart, which so few things excite when early youth is passed, had subsided, I could not but wistfully ask

myself, why such noble works are not also selected to form a part of the morning performances at our Musical Festivals, instead of being thrust into the schemes of Concerts five hours long, when all the provincial world is waiting to hear the newest Italian airs and cadences from the Pasta or the Persiani of the hour.

This proposal to introduce great orchestral music into sacred performances, will sound strange to many, — perhaps unholy to some; but its wisdom is worth examining. There are works by all the great masters, so decidedly secular in tone, as to jar unpleasantly upon the mind on such occasions; and perhaps the only three of Beethoven's symphonies eligible would be — the one mentioned, the *Eroica*, with its grave and holy "Funeral March," and the Choral Symphony. The choice, again, would, in a great measure, depend upon the manner of the composition. Some of Beethoven's symphonies, besides being too secular in character, are too delicate in detail, to bear being rendered by a very large orchestra, in

which, to balance the stringed instruments, the wind-instruments would have to be doubled. That the master, in composing, had an eye to such gradation, may be clearly seen, on comparing, for instance, his overture to "Leonora," with that in C major, Op. 124., the "Fest. Overture," which, being obviously written for an enormous band, has never been properly heard in England, and hence is all but unknown. My remark must be taken in its larger sense of a protest against exclusiveness, the following out of which is, of course, subject to technical considerations. As regards the profanity of mere instrumental music, as opposed to the sacredness of the "Messiah," or of Spohr's "Last Judgment," let no one deceive himself. Our Musical Festivals are not direct acts of devotion because they are performances of holy words set to befitting music, and often held in churches. There are few that defend them on such grounds who would not start from the notion that they were worshipping, when they sit in silence before the "Madonna di San Sisto" of the Dresden Gallery, or when

they enter the stately cathedral at Antwerp to admire the great pictures Rubens has left there. And yet the two acts are precisely identical in character. It is not the mere adoption of the text of scripture by the musician, — it is not the selection of saints and angels by the painter, that make their works operate with a hallowing influence upon our vexed and worldly spirits. It is that the high thoughts which the artist has brought to his task awaken in us those better and more spiritual aspirings, which are too often stifled in the heavy sleep of self-indulgence, or the harsh tumult of money-getting, or the dissipating frivolity of society. "Music," says a far abler writer than I, "is religious, not merely by being linked to words expressive of supplication or praise, or enumerating the attributes of the Deity, and declaring the homage which devotion renders to those attributes, — but when its strains are felt as an agency acting upon the soul through the sense; when it makes the nerves thrill, when it touches, purifies, and elevates the mind; when it becomes over us a power and an influence

in which God seems to communicate with man, as he does through the harmonies of Nature."

To speak a little more technically of the interpretation of one of the sublimest strains of poetry in instrumental music: — in performing Beethoven's symphony, the orchestra, I have said, was, perhaps, hardly in its consentaneous expression what it might have been. But the earnestness and anxiety of its members, who betook themselves to their task — one heedless if he see-sawed over his violoncello as oddly as Dr. Johnson — another, if he rasped the very hair off his head — a third, if, like the bassoon player in "Bracebridge Hall," he "blew his face to a point," — made a sight at once new and, though amusing, calculated to disarm ridicule. Indeed, that sense of the whimsical and grotesque, which is so invaluable as a travelling companion to solitary persons, of necessity becomes far less sardonic in Germany than elsewhere. Every eye was fixed fast upon the conductor, with a submissiveness and an admiration which must have had their reciprocal effect, in inspiring him to go through

his fatiguing duties without flagging or impatience: and Dr. Mendelssohn's conducting, though easy in appearance, and, therefore, any thing but distracting to the eye, is about the strictest in spirit of any I have ever witnessed, that of Moscheles alone excepted.

After the symphony, a weak and tame *contralto* singer, with a profusion of fair ringlets, went through the delicious *arioso* in "St. Paul," "But the Lord is mindful of his own:" after which the conductor, till then personally a stranger, came down to me, and gave me a friendly welcome to Germany. There is much temptation when distinguished persons like himself are in question, to trench upon the ground of private intercourse, and to gratify the public by filling up the outline it is already familiar with, by exhibiting in detail one genially gifted with many talents besides that to which his life has been devoted, exercising an indulgent and flattering kindness, which it were a shame not to acknowledge. But — to name no higher motive — I mean to travel again; and will therefore only tell as much as any of the

hundreds who fixed their eyes upon the composer in the Egydien Kirche could tell also.

None of the portraits of Dr. Mendelssohn do his face justice. There is, indeed, urgent need of some new Titian or Vandyke to perpetuate the great musicians, who rarely meet with better treatment than such as Dantan can afford in his clever but superficial busts. As far as regards the composer of the "Midsummer Night's Dream," some of the portraits extant give the outline, and the settled serious expression of his face in repose; but none of them that play of the eye, shifting from poetical enthusiasm to poetical humour, which lights up his countenance when he speaks. I have never seen features upon which archness and mirth seemed more at home; and it is easy to believe what those who know Dr. Mendelssohn best predict — namely, that whenever he chooses to write his opera, he may possibly develop in it a vivacity of comic inspiration, at least as remarkable as the breadth and gravity (not heaviness) of idea which characterise his serious works.

The rehearsal proceeded: a psalm of Schneider's was gone through — the "Hallelujah chorus" from the Messiah — and Weber's Jubilee Overture; all with care and intelligence. That painful conviction, that nine tenths of the orchestra feels itself employed in manufacturing music, which is so constantly forced upon the listener at English rehearsals, could never be entertained here for one single moment. There are certain proverbs which are kept alive with us by their absurdity; and the saying that "a reformed rake makes the best husband," is not, in Manners, a more fatal fallacy than, in Music, the equally common adage, that "the worst rehearsal makes the best performance." If this be translated into common-sense, what else can it mean, than that, having been more than usually indifferent and insubordinate at a trial, the English orchestral player is compelled at a full performance to fulfil his duties with that extra measure of zeal and attention which the German musician finds it his pleasure to bring to bear upon all he does, — whether going through the flimsy and worn-out symphony to one of

Bellini's *cavatinas*, or trying an intricate and not engaging slow movement by Lachner or Lindpaintner?

The audience remained attentive and numerous till the last chord; and then dispersed in happy anticipation of the morrow — Dr. Mendelssohn, to be serenaded by some of the young men of the town with some of the part-songs, which make up as peculiar a feature in German music as our glees at home. Of these in another time and place.

CHAP. II.

FIRST DAY.

THE ORATORIO. — THE DINNER.

Early Hours in Brunswick. — Primitive Equipages. — A Retrospect of a Dublin Festival with Paganini. — Contrasts in Costume. — A Word upon Costumes at Home. — Honours to Dr. Mendelssohn. — The Popularity of the "St. Paul" compared with that of "The Last Judgment." — Its Freedom from Manner, — Its dramatic Effects, — Its four great Songs. — The Performance compared with English Performances. — The Singers. — Madame Fischer-Achten, — Herr Fischer, — Herr Schmetzer. — The Reception of "St. Paul." — German and English Modesty. — The Dinner. — The Decorations. — Impudent Englishman. — The Cookery. — The Musical Honours. — "Dankes-Grufs." — A straightforward Dialogue. — The Climax and Close of the Feast.

Poor —— used to say, that people who "rose betimes," as the proverb hath it, might be known for the rest of the day by the air of spiritual pride they thought themselves entitled to assume. The inhabitants of Brunswick richly earned the right of being thus vainglorious on the first morning of their Festival. By six

o'clock, A.M., there was no possibility of further sleep. Not only was the entire "Blue Angel" stirring and clamorous for its breakfast; the whole town was blithely alive. In every room of the opposite four-story house, which seemed nodding into my little light chamber, the work of adorning was busily going on: in one window, the first flourish of the razor; in another, the last shoulder-knot pinned on, or the sash tied. But neither gentlemen nor ladies denied themselves the pleasure of throwing wide the casements, and leaning out into the fresh autumnal sunshine, as often as the frequent sound of creaking springs, jingling wheels, the leisurely trot of horses, or the eager bawling of their drivers announced that another cargo of pleasurers was coming in to enjoy or assist in the execution of Mendelssohn's "St. Paul."

Certainly, these equipages were things to admire at. The old Irish post-chaise, out of which, upon its being rolled from the coach-house, three hens flew, leaving an egg behind them, would have figured as a vehicle of worship among some of the machines which deposited

their full freight beneath my windows. German *wagons* of an older date than the Electors and Electresses I did *not* see at Celle — horses reminding one of Mrs. Butler's picture of the Pennsylvanian charger, more "like an old hair trunk" worn bare than a creature to mount or to drive — harness cracked with neglect and brown with age — Jehus in liveries as far from our notions of what is neat and befitting as the Lord Edfort or *Sir* Hudlow of the French Opera Comique is from the real John Bull; — with cockades, top-boots, laced hats, livery coats, earrings, and heterogeneously coloured cotton handkerchiefs stuck on as each individual wearer judged best: — I shall never forget the scene, so new, so bustling, so cheerful. A temporary lull took place between seven and eight, when the world might be supposed to be at breakfast; by nine, every one was streaming towards the Egydien Kirche, which, even at that hour, was three parts full.

I have assisted at many Musical Festivals at home; in particular, I remember, as curious and characteristic, the Dublin meeting held in

the year 1831. The morning performances of this took place in the artificially-lighted theatre, the boxes of which were filled with a display of beauty I have never seen equalled, and the galleries overflowed with a dirty, half-clad audience, which, after its peculiar fashion, made no scruple of cracking jokes at the performers as they presented themselves. I remember their shrieks of delight when Paganini the wizard glided from the cloak which, like a cloud, enveloped him at the side scenes, to play his *rondo colla campanella* between the acts of the concert; and how, for a more distinct view of his wizard figure, the people compelled him to mount the pianoforte — a proceeding so much to their tastes, that on Braham coming next to sing (O, shame!) "The Bay of Biscay," they insisted upon his doing the same, and all but exacted a similar compliance from gentle Madame Stockhausen in her turn. *That* was a scene as lively, as full of contrast, as the English heart could desire. Yet more gaily various as a sight was the audience in the Egydien Kirche at Brunswick. Elegantly dressed girls in the transparent

and gay toilettes of an English ball-room, might be seen, sitting side by side with the gipsy-coloured, hard-handed peasant-women of the district, whose black caps, by the way,—gracefully displaying the head and picturesquely decorated with pendant streamers of ribbon,—are quite worth the attention of any lady who has beauty or courage enough to resolve upon a new mode. Here, again, was a comely youth, tight-laced in his neat uniform, and every hair of his moustache trimmed and trained to an agony of perfection, squeezed up against a dirty, savage, half-naked student;—half-naked, I may say, without exaggeration, when I remember one figure, with his long, wild hair half way down his back, and his velveteen coat, which, confined at the waist with one solitary button, made it evident, beyond the possibility of mistake, that neither waistcoat nor shirt was underneath. The orchestra, on the other hand, had an appearance of uniformity we rarely see. The lady-singers, though all serving gratuitously, both amateurs and theatrical artists, had wisely agreed to merge all individual fancies in an

unexpensive, but delicate and pretty uniform of white, with a large nosegay by way of ornament.* The whole assembly of orchestra and audience, thus heterogeneously composed, was cemented by one sympathetic desire to honour Mendelssohn; and this was as strongly, if not as vivaciously expressed, as the curiosity to have out "the man who played on the one string" testified by the boys and girls of the Dublin

* Our sturdy national disposition to resist the slightest control in matters of taste — the same which makes the suburbs of our towns so prettily varied, and their street-architecture so incongruous and ineffective — the same which militates among many other causes against the formation of a thoroughly good orchestra from English materials, — tells oddly, on occasions like these, in this same matter of costume. I remember, at the last rehearsal of "Acis and Galatea," given by one of our provincial choral societies, overhearing one young lady of the choir, while discussing the delicate matter of her *coiffure*, say to her neighbour, "Ringlets is out; I shall go Fanny Kemble-wise." When the evening arrived, the Galatea, who was terribly thin and spectacled, and fifty or thereabouts, presented herself in a triumphant scarlet hat; only one among a group of figures similarly ridiculous, whose ill-considered and not-to-be-overruled tawdriness turned a really fine performance (I have never heard the chorus "Wretched lovers" so well sung before or since), into a broad farce.

gallery. All eyes waited his — not the Duke's — coming. His conductor's desk was wreathed with a fresh garland of flowers; — upon it, beside the score of his oratorio, was laid another more delicate bouquet ready for his use, and if I mistake not, for his refreshment, a paper cornucopia of those dainties in which every good German housewife is so skilful. We should laugh at these *petits soins* in London; — at Brunswick they were pretty, because hearty and natural.

Precisely at ten o'clock the performance began. I had heard the oratorio of "St. Paul" two or three times before, but never so thoroughly enjoyed it. There was much, of course, in time, place, and sympathy. What caviller against German crudity and mysticism could have resisted the "Euryanthe" conducted by Weber at Vienna? — and I should feel small patience with the most conscientious and intellectual contemner of Italian meretriciousness who at Venice could remain cold to the "Semiramide" of Rossini, performed under the auspices of *Il Maestro* himself! But, allowing for these in-

fluences as largely as may be required, there is little modern music which gains so much with every subsequent hearing as that of the "St. Paul." It has one element of permanence as well as of progression, simplicity of treatment as well as elevation of idea. The composer has refrained from thrusting himself upon his subject at the expense of some of those individualities, which, in the first instance, enchant by surprising, though ere long they become palling as mannerisms. How — to give an instance — was all England at first fascinated by the "Last Judgment" of Spohr when it was first imported! We thought it impossible ever to be tired of the composer's peculiar and rich harmonies, of his exquisitely symmetrical constructions. How were we enthralled by the quartett with chorus at the end of the first part; in the second, by the pathetic duet, "Forsake me not," and by the chorus "Destroyed is Babylon," with that holy burial-strain, "Blest are the departed," which succeeds it, — Spohr's finest specimen of dramatic contrast. Yet, what has now become of all

these seductions? Familiarity with the master has shown us the spell of them exercised indiscriminately, and with little variation, in every form of composition; and, save by a few who "on honey-dew have fed," till they have been incapable of digesting any food without such a cloying condiment, Spohr runs an unfair chance of being as extravagantly undervalued as he was, ten years ago, extravagantly overpraised.

The reception of the "St. Paul" has been altogether different. From that musical Ultima Thule, the English provinces, on the one hand, — taking in, by the way, an English palace*, where a chorus was selected by royal dilettantism to figure between Ricci and Rossini's opera pieces, — to Vienna on the other, the public of which is accused by good Herr von Raumer of being wholly delivered over to "Italian singsong," its fame has spread and deepened, — whether to take permanent root or not let the Sybils declare. But it has good chance on its side, so far as avails a composer's total avoidance of all the modes and manners of the hour, carried

* At Her Majesty's private concert last spring.

even to the point of a Quakerish aversion of those furbelows and phylacteries of ornament which change at the caprice of every new generation of singers. Yet, in spite of Mendelssohn's disregard of all these ephemeral props and decorations, how forcible in their simple truth are its effects! How thrillingly expressed, by the multiplication of treble voices and wind instruments, is the celestial apparition in the scene of Saul's conversion! How ferociously real are the cries of the multitude at the stoning of St. Stephen! How melodious, in the sweet holiness of consolation, is the funeral chorus, "O happy and blest are they," when the protomartyr is laid in his grave! There is a little design in *chiaro-scuro* by Martin, of a burial in a cavern, — if I recollect right, of Sarah in the cave of Macpelah, — the deep shadows and struggling lights of which, around the group of mourners bending reverentially over the dust of the departed, never fail to come back to me upon the deliciously undulating accompaniment, and the grave but soothing chaunt of the voices of that chorus. Nor less dramatically has

the composer thrown himself into the hymn of adoration given to the heathen, when, astounded by the miraculous powers of the Apostles, "they called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercurius; and the Priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people." The frieze of some Grecian temple, with its choral dancers, and its flower-decked altar, is not further in character from some "Pieta," or martyrdom of Christian art, than the delicious strain, "O be gracious, ye immortals," from the funeral anthem just mentioned, or from that serenely exulting strain of hope, "How lovely are the messengers!"

I am not pretending to analyse the "St. Paul;" but, in adverting to some of its claims on the future, the scope it gives to the principal singers must not be forgotten. Though it afford less opportunity for separate display than some of Handel's oratorios, — not than his best, "Israel in Egypt," — or than Haydn's "Creation," — it still contains a song of the very highest order, for each voice of the vocal

quartett. Need I enumerate for the *soprano*, the song "Jerusalem;" for the *contralto*, that delicious *arioso*, "But the Lord is mindful of his own;" for the *basso* the scene, "O God, have mercy upon me;" — and for the tenor the *cantabile* "Be thou faithful unto death!" than which Handel himself has hardly left us a tenor air deeper or more earnest in its expressiveness? Every song, moreover, is not only tempting to declaim, but agreeable to sing. Here and there, in some contemporary works there may be a more startling point of choral force than any occurring in the "St. Paul;" but, if these songs be taken as a group, it may be questioned whether any thing has been produced equal to it since the days of the still unapproached "Messiah."

In some respects the performance of "St. Paul" must have satisfied its author, were he even so ultra sensitive as ——, who, it is said, has never endured to witness a single representation of any one of his many plays. The chorus was extremely good, clear in the delivery of its tone, and its precision to be inferred

from the tremendous sibilation on certain words, to an amount of *ssssss-sforzando*, which I have never remarked at home, even in the performance of the choruses, "For unto *us* a child is born," or, "From the cen*s*er,"— both favourites with English chorus singers, but full of the dangerous sound. It was a great relief to be delivered from male counter-tenors, to which no use or tradition will ever reconcile my ear; it was a great triumph to one who has always denounced that voice as unnatural and offensive, to find that the quartett gained by the substitution of *contralti*, which indeed are stronger upon the characteristic notes — the deepest — of their part, while the highest are attained without that nasality and effort which all men (Rubini perhaps excepted) must use, when in *falsetto* approaching the *soprano* register. But the absence of an organ to support and blend the voices, was as great a loss, as the substitution just praised was a gain. In the fugue at the opening of the second part, and in most of the choruses, this was sadly felt. It is one of the few English indispensables which the Germans would do well to naturalize, and for the want

of which, in grand sacred music, not even the superiority of their orchestras, or the heartiness of zeal, such as characterised every chord of the Brunswick chorus, can altogether satisfactorily compensate.

The solo exhibitions were, as usual, the least admirable part of the performance. Yet, here, too, were observable a steadiness and a self-sacrifice eminently commendable to English imitation. No drawling of the time, — no neglect of speaking the text, — no long-drawn displays of a single note esteemed particularly exquisite in its height or depth; — no cadences or trills whatsoever: indeed my ear sometimes missed the shake, which, judiciously applied, gives a grace without frivolity to all sacred music. But the singers, if more correct, were harder, and less finished, than ours. Madame Fischer-Achten threw even less feeling into the tones of her clear and satisfactory *soprano* voice, than Miss —— is used to do. The principal *contralto*, as I have already said, was weak and tame, making nothing of her song whatsoever. Still drier and less expressive was Herr Fischer, the

bass singer of the Oratorio. I was defending him on the score of his artist-like simplicity and exactness, to a German musical friend of mine who had heard the "St. Paul" in England, and who answered — "Yes, but I would willingly compound with any of your English flourishes, if he would but give the song as much feeling and elevation as Phillips!" What could be urged in answer? If the taste of the Germans have of late unduly taken the direction of "Italian sing-song," (to adopt Von Raumer's contemptuous appellation,) one cause may be, a want among their home artists of southern vocal cultivation, as well as a predilection for southern roulades and *cantilenas*. Even good Herr Schmetzer, the tenor, the best of the party, and whose fine voice was shown to great advantage by the music, was coarse and unfinished in comparison with more than one of our own tenors, Braham being put out of the question. With every disposition to distrust my own ears, and not to listen pedantically because I listened carefully, I could not but feel how large and grave was the entire deficiency. And yet I was told,

upon authority not to be questioned, that the great songs of the "St. Paul" had not hitherto been better executed in Germany.

I was a little disappointed with the audience. Though noiselessly attentive, it was not quite as warm as I had fancied a German audience might be. Applause, of course, there was none; but neither was there ever that deep and universal murmur, as of the wind sweeping a rich corn field, which I have heard at home in our churches, when any passage of peculiar beauty has stirred the whole multitude. The Duke, for whom an arm-chair at the top of the chancel steps had been arranged thronewise, came and went, exciting even less sensation than is excited by *our* Duke of Brunswick entering his opera-box. Between the first and second acts the ladies and gentlemen were far too busy, interchanging smiles and civilities, and partaking of the thousand good things with which every one had come prepared, to have eyes or attentions for any one; and, having followed Mendelssohn out of the orchestra with an eager eye of respect, began to stay their appetites as

zealously as if one o'clock had not been the usual dinner hour, and three the time appointed for the state banquet to be held that day in honour of the composer "*um Medicinisches Garten.*"

The dispersion of the audience, when all was over, was as amusing as its gathering had been. My countrywomen are heroines in crowds when compared with the blooming, fearful-looking damsels of North Germany; who, again, are perhaps more willing to be openly tended and comforted by their cavaliers, than with us would be thought maidenly. Some of the elder folks were still more precious. I watched one capital ancient couple, of great ponderosity, as, face to face and hand-in-hand, — the lady cleaving rear-foremost her track through the crowd by a steady pressure, — they squeezed their way along, smiling as languishingly on each other as if they had been a pair of lovers. Without the church the scene was very gay. The same wonderful equipages as I had seen in the morning, were here, there, and everywhere, departing, packed full of the songstresses and the female part of the audience, bareheaded,

smiling, and yet, in spite of such a liberal display, as free from coquetry as from awkwardness. There are English ladies who, reading this, will say, "Bareheaded in open carriages at one o'clock in the day!—how bold and improper!" and a moment afterwards, as a matter of course, tie on the bonnets which are to enhance their attractions, while they are playing the part of shopwomen at some Fababo Fancy Fair!

"She cried, 'From such murders how guiltless am I,'—
Then ran to regale on a new-taken fly."

The great object of attraction was now The Dinner—how to get a good place to eat, to see, and to hear; and all the prudent hastened at once from the church to the Vauxhall saloon with this object. After a few ineffectual attempts to gain entrance at the great door, the scullery was charged by the anxious multitude; and we made our way in,—gentlemen and ladies equally eager,—through a legion of astonished cooks, who were busy over troughs so plentifully heaped with coarse vegetables as to threaten

rather than promise for the future. The hall was arranged with three rows of long tables—the centre seats of the centre one being destined for the principal guest and the committee. A long range of windows displayed Dr. Mendelssohn's name in transparent letters: his portrait was suspended at one end in the midst of a bower of evergreens; and the room was hung with garlands, in which, besides autumn flowers, were so many strong-smelling herbs, that a country apothecary's laboratory has hardly a more medicinal atmosphere. Taste is not the same thing in Brunswick as in Dresden; and the hall would have been better for some of the notable old garland weavers who ply their trade before Tieck's door, in the Altmarkt of the Saxon capital, and make up wreaths and chaplets of a richness and elegance which would bring a fortune in Covent Garden. By three o'clock, candles and chandeliers were lighted; and when I returned to take my seat, the principal places were occupied by gentlemen and ladies in full dress,—the latter looking none the less strange for the mixture of autumn sun-

light and artificial glare by which their cheerful faces and gay clothes were displayed.

My lot cast me into a small ante-room, commanding the whole hall, and eligible, therefore, for a looker-on. Other circumstances in my position were less agreeable. I was too near one of my countrymen; and, having already received much civility from entire strangers on whom I had no claim whatsoever, it was intolerable to be attacked by him with a coarse and personal remark upon the ladies of the party close opposite to us at table. How the young travelling Englishman is endured in Germany, I often wondered; and as often felt humbled by receiving heart-warm kindness and hospitality, when I remembered how little it is felt, if even not grossly recompensed, by many of my age and condition calling themselves gentlemen! It was necessary, openly and aloud, to put an entire stop to my neighbour's communications; but, till the end of the dinner, he never ceased wrangling with the waiters, abusing the food set before him, and imprudently thrusting himself upon those he had commented on, with a

noisy audacity which one would have been ashamed to encounter in the Travellers' room of a second-rate English inn, after the third round of brandy and water.

Truth to say, the viands were detestable, and as badly served as at our most parsimonious charity-dinner. Even a Mr. Dulcimer's politeness could have found nothing to praise in the messes of stale veal with *haricots* as dry as acorns, and of greasy purple cabbage garnished with fat bacon, which those ample troughs had yielded! Three mortal hours were the dishes in procession. At the end of the third course the composer's health was drunk with musical honours, — the first of many such jovial transactions, — and there was time enough between the *entrées* for gentlemen to go and pay visits to their friends; while those who kept their seats did all but break their glasses with their knives, in the energy of their impatient summonses to the weary, perspiring waiters, who toiled here and there — saluted by a fresh volley of objurgation at every new dainty exhibited. The principal musical illustration of

the feast was cunningly presented between a black unwholesome *bouilli*, which, from its appearance, might have been any strange flesh whatsoever, and Falstaff's favourite dish, "a mess of stewed prawns," rejected unanimously by every nose in company. This was a complimentary *piece d'occasion* in three verses.

Dankes Gruſs
dem
Herrn
Dr. Felix Mendelſsohn Bartholdy.

The applause with which it was received was ear-splitting, and the music was as good as such music is generally; not as good, of course, as our own "Glorious Apollo," or "While Fools their Time;" — but then it was joined in by the ladies, — an aid which our public dinners rarely receive, save when some charitable songstress obligingly consents to sing "Lo! here the gentle lark," from The Gallery.

Like my neighbours, I had left my seat, and approached as near the central table as was possible, to hear this laudatory effusion; when I found myself stopped and accosted, by a good-natured-looking middle-aged soul, in a black

velveteen coat, who, sans ceremony, asked me "if I would tell him where I came from;" then, what my name was; and next, what was my age! There was nothing for it but, in reply, to inquire if he wished to see my passport. "No!" was his answer, with a very hearty laugh, in which the bystanders joined; our dialogue being carried on in a most edifying mixture of tongues. Then he asked me whether I did not know Dr. Mendelssohn — whether (making signs the while, as if he had a pen in his hand) I was not a *litteraire*. . . . . I thought all this sufficiently familiar, but least troublesomely dispatched by a "Yes," on which he warmly shook hands with me, and went away. I afterwards saw this gentleman often, and heard his name. He never addressed me again. Every one seemed to know him; but no one could or would tell me his calling; so that whether it was a piece of Brunswick good-nature, Brunswick impudence, Brunswick journalism, or Brunswick police (I was helped to all these solutions by my German friends), I know not to this day.

By degrees the hubbub became unbearable. One table-song succeeded another; and there were some little bands of singers, not engaged for the occasion, who, like Goldsmith's gentlemen at the "Free and Easy," were willing to make their voices heard, even in singing to a plate trundling on its edges, rather than keep still;—and who kept breaking out, in four parts, in their own corners, in valiant contempt of the general harmony. Champagne-bottles exploded so rapidly as to make a continuous *feu de joie*. Cigars were lighted by scores, and cries for "*eis*" (ice) resounded fast and furiously. How the guest, in honour of whom all this conviviality had been prepared, kept his hearing, I cannot tell, when, as a climax, Schmetzer, the tenor, no light weight, was lifted upon the shoulders of some of the young fellows, and borne round the room with roars of Bacchanal triumph. For myself, long ere this mirthful consummation was reached, I was glad to exchange the atmosphere, which might have been helped with a spoon, for the glowing and calm freshness of a September evening.

CHAP. III.

SECOND DAY.

THE ORATORIO. — THE BALL.

Length of English and German Entertainments. — Bach and Mendelssohn. — The Dom-Kirche. — Organ-Playing. — Honours to Mendelssohn. — The German Chorus-Singer in London. — The Post-Boy at Cologne. The Prussian Corporal. — The Oratorio. — False Taste in the *Programme* (with a Note on the Schwerin Festival of 1840). — German Performance of Handel. — The Ball. — A Glance at a Volksfest at Marksuhl. — More Honours to Mendelssohn. — His Coronation in the Theatre. — English Opinions on such an Apotheosis, with a Word on the social Treatment of Musicians in England. — The Ball.

In nothing is the difference between home and foreign arrangements more striking than in the quantity of entertainment deemed fashionable and sufficient. Talk of the English as lukewarm in the matter of public amusements! Where else shall we find audiences willing to be shut up in the strait seats of a theatre, or the cramping benches of an opera pit, from seven o'clock in

the evening till an hour past midnight? — where else, frames robust enough to endure, as at our provincial festivals, four hours of oratorio in the morning, and five hours of concert in the evening, with all the intermediate hurries and cares attendant on the pleasure? "Rap, rap all day, and fruz, fruz all neet," the old Duchess of Gordon's laconic description of life in London, might be adopted for the motto of quantity in English dissipation, whether its object be the new missionary from Hindustan or Owyhee, or the new Italian songstress, who has two notes more in the *altissimo* scale, and sixteen demi-semi-quavers more in one breath, than any of her predecessors!

I was sitting revolving this important distinction in my mind on the second morning, and rejoicing in the rationality of a few hours' pause, when Dr. Mendelssohn kindly paid me a visit. There were some MSS. of Sebastian Bach to be inspected; there was to be organ-playing in the Dom-Kirche: in short, it was to be one of those mornings of musical lounging and luxury, which, as regards real enjoyment

of, and insight into, the art, are sometimes worth a score of formal performances. Once again the friendly hospitality must be dwelt upon which included in these choice pleasures a total stranger, without his being allowed, for a single instant, to feel himself tolerated or *de trop*. If mine be a right idea of Brunswick, indeed, a more cheerful or agreeable residence could hardly be found in Germany, for any one willing to exchange the finer intellectual cultivation of other cities for the genial old-world usages which Fashion has not laughed nor Prosperity hardened out of the inhabitants of the place. The observer of manners will there still find the elegantly dressed and accomplished lady of the house rising up from table "on hospitable cares intent," to see that every guest's plate may be heaped to his own liking; while the host does not conceive himself excused, by a rich official uniform, from with his own hands carrying round his rarest wine, sweetening every glass as he pours it out, with some frank and pleasant saying and complacent smile. I wish I might

acknowledge, by name, the attentions of those by whose agency I know thus much of the hospitable ways and the friendly hearts of Brunswick.

The Bach manuscripts did not turn out any thing very extraordinary. It was interesting to hear Mendelssohn pronouncing on their authenticity with the certainty of a Beckford when examining a Cellini carving or jewel: though for such a thorough-going intimacy one might have been prepared by the spirit which runs through the younger composer's harmonies, especially in his later works, and by the circumstance of his being one of the finest organ-players of his time. No studies for this instrument like the "Sebastiana," as Göthe used to call the compositions of the great musician of Leipsig. There is yet another affinity between the two men, far asunder as are their conditions, and their opportunities of education, namely, in their being both true Germans; — not given to wander in the search of applause and popularity, but resting quietly among their own people; and, with honesty and patience,

producing solid and worthy works, neither for Fashion nor money's sake, but for the love of Art and of country. Such a life, and such ambition, can hardly fail to imprint a character on the productions thus originated. Nothing in them will be feverish, nothing sacrificed to the modes of the hour; they will be characterised by a healthy, noble, dignified strain of imagination; free and simple and sincere in its expression. In originality and freshness of idea, it will not do to compare any modern writer with the grand old fuguist; but, in the spirit of his life and professional career, I cannot but think that Mendelssohn has succeeded to something more than a few of Sebastian Bach's peculiar chords and progressions, and unbounded mastery over the pedal-board.

The interior of the Dom-Kirche in Brunswick is striking — striking from its antiquity, and the air of bleak naked cheerlessness which, if the unpleasant truth be told, hardly ever fails to follow the steps of Lutheranism, when possessing itself of a Catholic building. Besides the relics which date back to the crusading days

of Henry the Lion, and his statue, — and besides the ivory horn and pipe of St. Blaize, the patron of the town, — and besides the coffins of the hero who fell at Waterloo at the head of his black Brunswickers (not to be approached by an Englishman without a thrill of grateful pride), and the coffin of our ill-starred Queen Caroline (not to be approached without a thrill of shame, whatever be the political creed of the gazer), — besides these objects of interest in the vaults, the upper church has its curiosities — its fine effigies, and its quaint old seven-branched candlestick on the altar, obviously Byzantine in date, and to be accepted readily as an authentic copy of the candlestick in the Temple of Jerusalem, by all who are not disposed to wrangle with Tradition. The organ case, too, though dolefully worm-eaten and spoiled with white paint, is a fine piece of carving, of course a trifle less antique. The instrument was sadly out of order; but Mendelssohn made it speak most gloriously, winding up nearly an hour's magnificent playing, by one of Bach's grand fugues. But the thing that

comes the most vividly before me, in recalling that morning, is the expression of love and dutiful reverence on the faces of half a dozen urchins, who awaited the composer, cap in hand, at the foot of the gallery stairs. Nothing analogous to it is to be found in English admiration or French enthusiasm. It is pleasing to think that Age does not necessarily destroy that look: one evidence of those feelings whereby Man is made so much the worthier. Old faces are to be seen shining out in the obscure corners of German orchestras, even over such subordinate instruments as the drum, or the least wanted wind-instrument, on which the same homely but hearty attachment to their art and their occupation, and the same respect for any distinguished talent whom chance has sent among them, is to be as openly read as when their owners were fifteen. It was curious and interesting to catch a glimpse of like admiration behind the scenes of our German Opera in London, where, on a certain evening of the past season, chance brought a handful of distinguished instrumentalists just at the moment when the final

chorus of "Der Freischutz" was sung. The bass or tenor at the end of the semicircle was a huge coarse man, with *würst* and *sauer kraut* in every line of his face and every square inch of his body; but when the names of —— and —— were pronounced, how his face lit up as he passed them on to his neighbour! The illumination lasted only a moment, — but in it lay the secret of the success of the German chorus.

This interest in Music and Drama meets one in Germany under every variety of impersonation. I shall always connect the interesting approach from Aix to Cologne — the blue Siebengebirge rising like a cloud on the horizon to warn the pilgrim that he is approaching Father Rhine — with the honest good-humoured fellow who served as postilion when I travelled that road last October. Smart, civil, and intelligent, our party made the more of him from having, on the preceding day, been annoyed with Belgian boorishness and brutality; the latter in the form of a handsome round-faced fair-haired boy, who laughed at the raw shoulder of his

bleeding horse, and, having signalised our entry into the midst of a *Kirmesse* at Verviers by cutting a child across the eyes with his stinging whip, set up the same vacant reply to our remonstrance. Of other stuff was our German — good-natured, frank, intelligent; pointing out every object on the way,—amongst other notable things, a carriage encountered not long before our coming in sight of the Byzantine peaks of St. Geryon's and the Apostles' churches. This, he said, contained the theatrical company; "and," he added, "I take great interest in them."—"Why so?" was the natural question. "Oh, I act myself; and I act very well."—"And what is it you act?" It appeared that our friend was what in technical language is termed a supernumerary. "And did you ever wear a Roman dress?" asked ——. "No," was his answer, "but very often armour; and they generally make a herald of me, because I can blow the horn."

The very same evening, while ascending the Rhine, we stumbled upon a lover of Art in one of yet sterner vocation. This was a

magnificent-looking Prussian corporal, six feet high, and stalwart in proportion; his face ruddy with exposure to the weather, and its deep crimson setting off in vivid contrast the pale hair and moustaches with which it was plentifully garnished. He was a true military character, — erect and sententious, — one who knew the world. He was bound from Cologne to a duck-supper at the *Kirmesse* of Bonn, where he was stationed, and was taking all a soldier's tender care (the race is good to children) of a little girl, as pretty a creature as I ever saw, whom a seat in M——'s britschka, and a handful of dried plums, exalted into a queen in her own estimation. Twenty years ago this brave fellow had taught one of our party the art of swimming; and after the honest and joyful recognition of master and pupil, who had never met in the interim, the Corporal began to tell all that he had since seen and heard. Nor was this the common soldier's story. He was a man of trust and function, and had been one of those intrusted with the delicate service of arresting the Archbishop of Cologne. The

prelate, he said, when aware of his entrance and his errand, had simply said, "Do you smoke?—I see you do—so do I. We shall not quarrel on our journey." On one of our party addressing the other by his name, — "What!" he exclaimed, "the great pianist! I am glad to have seen him." And then it came out that the Corporal had his own taste in music, and he favoured us with his judgment upon "Il Barbiere," which he had heard at Cologne the evening before, and did not much approve. "I have always read the papers carefully," said he, "to see what is good; so that by this time I think I ought to know something about the matter." The Corporal's connoisseurship and the postboy's dramatic skill and horn-playing might make up a very small amount of artistic qualification; but it is of the aggregate of such things that a nation's taste is composed.

To return to the Festival. Brunswick dined in the interval between the organ-playing and the commencement, at two o'clock, of the performance in the church. This last would hardly be accepted as sacred, according to the English

acceptation of the word; for the *programme* ran thus: —

FIRST PART.

"Jubilee Overture" - -	*Weber.*
Adagio (violin), Herr Müller -	*Spohr.*
Psalm - - - - -	*Schneider.*

SECOND PART.

Concerto (clarionet), Herr Tretbar	*Klein.*
Symphony, C minor - -	*Beethoven.*
"Hallelujah Chorus" (Messiah) -	*Handel.*

A selection comprising three master-works could hardly have been made less satisfactory than this.* The two instrumental solos, though

* Other selections of music, on these occasions, which have come before me, would disappoint those who have conceived a high idea of Germán musical taste and cultivation. At the Summer Festival of 1840, given at Mecklenburg-Schwerin, where, also, the "St. Paul" with the "Creation" were performed entire, four of the vocal pieces at the concert were, an air by Faccioli, Donnizetti's sickly "Vivi tu," Bellini's noisy duet, "Suoni la tromba," and a flimsy bravura, with violin *obligato*, from Herold's "Pré aux Clercs," — the last *encored*. I do not believe that Schubert's songs are, in any German concerts, stock pieces as established as at Paris. This disappointing want of nationality and self-respect, however, seems happily confined to vocal music. Of its working, as regards the condition of Opera in Germany, I shall have occasion largely to record my impressions.

But if the *programme* of the Schwerin concert be dis-

very well played, were sadly out of place, not only in a church, but with reference to the massive and dignified compositions among which they were set. Among these last, however, Schneider's psalm is not to be included, it being merely one of those correct and unmarked mediocrities which may, at times, become more antipathetic to the ear than compositions containing glaring faults or frivolities, but still characteristic. Nor could I be satisfied with the execution of Handel's "Hallelujah." Dignity, breadth, grandeur, mass of tone, seemed wanting; it was taken, moreover, a trifle too fast. It was something to fancy that, with not much that is peculiar and exclusive to boast of in music, we English possess the secret of Handel! I have not had many opportunities of testing the reasonableness of this fancy; but the

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appointing, because ill considered, that Festival furnished another to my list of illustrations of the extent to which music is the hearty care of gentle and simple in Germany. So all-pervading was the interest of the meeting, that the Duke placed all his officers and household attendants at the service of the committee.

few hitherto permitted me abroad have always been followed by the same result. The solo singing of M. Geraldy, of the Brussels Conservatoire, is, perhaps, the most striking exception.

The Egydien Kirche, as before, was crowded; the orchestra and chorus, as before, were sedulous and energetic. When the symphony of Beethoven was over, a *feu de joie* of splendid *bouquets*, carefully hidden up till then, was discharged upon the conductor, by the ladies. But the climax of enthusiasm was yet to come.

This was reserved for the ball in the evening. Of all describable things a ball is one of the most indescribable on paper, unless it be a Paris *bal masqué*, — which, indeed, has only too many remarkable features! A people's ball, too, is a pretty thing. I shall not soon forget a picture I saw, during a stoppage of the Schnellpost betwixt Leipsic and Frankfort, in the midst of a *volksfest*, at Marksuhl, on the edge of the Thuringian forest, just as twilight was beginning to close in. The little market-place was gaily dressed out. Round the pine-tree in its centre four smaller ones

had been planted. In the midst, raised upon a platform, stood a fiddler and a fifer, playing *galoppe* tunes, in the true spirit, though the fiddle was cracked, and the fife asthmatic. A trombone or two had been laid by, that the musicians, too, might take a turn; and round and round, by that lessening light, were seen careering the entire population of the place: young men in *kittels* (blouses), with maidens in their flat country caps, little boys and girls, and tougher older people than are ever to be found on the floor with us, save, perhaps, on a holiday eve in South Wales,—the whole party performing their evolutions with an ease, a smoothness, and an absence of rudeness or riot, delightful to see. They had still some hours of waltz in them! Presently, from among the bystanders, a good-natured man detached himself, and offered to all the Schnellpost strangers round a glass of beer from the patriarchal bottle beside him; nor would partners have been wanting, had time and travel allowed any of us to join the maze. — But this is an inadmissible digression from the apotheosis of Mendelssohn at the

Brunswick Festival, which—to come back to our starting point— made the ball not only delightful, but describable.

The scene of this festive ceremony was the theatre, which had been gaily decorated for the occasion, though not sufficiently lighted. A suite of rooms had been temporarily added for supper. At the furthest depth of the stage a stately pavilion, draperied with white, had been erected. This was at first concealed by the curtain, which was kept down till the right moment—the arrival of the composer. When he entered the theatre, according to preconcerted signal, he was met by two young girls, who led him gently forward—the curtain meanwhile slowly rising—to this shrine of honour. Six other young ladies, dressed as *genii*, there awaited him; and, after a brief address from one of them, a laurel crown was placed on his head.

Why is it that an Englishman feels a certain reluctant hesitation in recording this, and the enthusiasm which attended the whole innocent triumph, as though he were giving an undue importance to a piece of child's play? Are not

the sums we lavish on Art — is not the toleration extended by Fashion to certain "stars" and wonders,—the rest, *if paid*, despised, neglected, and thrust aside, — at least as flagrant a folly? Surely the enthusiasm was not much wiser, which was displayed in one of England's Theatres Royal, at the Van Amburgh dinner, than at this same Brunswick coronation. For charity's sake, let *neither* manifestation be assumed as extravagant or irrational; but, for justice's sake, let English tongues be silenced by remembering what has been done for prize-fighters and menagerie-keepers, and forbear to satirize the Germans as overstrained and Della-Cruscan in their expressions of sympathy: neither let a tamer of wild beasts, however modest and worthy as a man, be placed in the scale of consideration *above* the friend and pupil of some of the greatest minds in Europe; and himself the most distinguished name among the moderns, in his own art.

Another digression! — yet not utterly valueless, if the comparative estimation of the musician in England is at all fairly shadowed forth

in it. In other respects, the ball was a mere ball — as I have said, indescribable. Pretty faces, and fresh toilettes, by the hundred; gay and gallant youths, only a little more hairy-visaged and tender than with us at home; a good band playing excellent waltz music; the Duke in his box for a part of the evening; a liberal and plenteous supper; and an English lady standing upright in the midst of the easy, blithe-faced multitude, and declaring, the while she fanned herself with an air of satisfied dignity, that "the company really behaved very well;" — this is all that is to be told concerning the ball at Brunswick.

CHAP. IV.

THIRD DAY.

MENDELSSOHN'S CONCERT. — THE OPERA.

Programme of the Concert. — Schmetzer's Singing. — Müller's Violin-playing. — Molique's Concertos. — Mendelssohn's Piano-forte playing compared with that of Moscheles, Chopin, Liszt. — His fancy. — The end of the Concert. — The end of an English Festival, with a thought of Malibran. — Dinner. — King Ernest of Hanover's English Followers. — The New Palace at Brunswick. — The Hof Theater. — More North German Good Nature. — "Guido and Ginevra." — Well-contrived Stage Arrangements. — A Word upon Classicality. — French Operas with German Words. — The Performance. — Schmetzer. — Pöck. — Madame Fischer-Achten. — The fourth Act. — The Catastrophe of my Evening.

The last entertainment of the Brunswick Festival was Dr. Mendelssohn's morning concert, given in the saloon where the public dinner had been held. The *programme* was excellent — alike for its selection and its brevity; a thing to be imitated by the perpetrators of our benefit concerts: —

FIRST PART.

Overture.
Air, "Il mio tesoro," sung by Herr Schmetzer *Mozart.*
Concerto P. F. (D minor), performed and composed by - - - - - *Mendelssohn.*

SECOND PART.

Violin Concerto. Herr Müller - - *Molique.*
Serenade P. F. and orchestra, performed and composed by - - - - *Mendelssohn.*
Symphony (A major) - - - *Beethoven.*

The piano-forte was, of course, in this concert the principal attraction. I was unable to relish Herr Schmetzer's singing of "Il mio tesoro," which was as much too coarse and unfinished as Rubini's execution of that far-famed cavatina seems wire-drawn and luscious, and sung (if the metaphor may be permitted) in black and white. Moreover, Herr Müller, the leader of the renowned Brunswick quartett, though an excellent violin-player of the true, as opposed to the tremulous and spasmodic school originated by Paganini, failed to interest me either by any speciality of execution, or in the choice of his music. With all their soundness of construction, and the quaint and graceful piquancy of some

of their *finales*, there is a dryness of contour in the concertos of Molique, which renders them unattractive to the amateur who is no violinist, save when they are aided by their composer's playing. The driest, however, are more welcome to the ear than the interminable airs with variations, the taste for which — thanks to the fickleness of Fashion — seems to be subsiding in favour of the elegy, the romance, the serenade, and the *notturno* of the fantastic and poetical school.

The piano-forte playing, then, was the chief treat. It is rarely that I have been so delighted without novelty or surprise having some share in the delight. The exact fulfilment of any anticipation is generally more or less blanking, though vanity and self-deceit refuse to allow it. It would have been absurd to expect much *pianism*, as distinct from music, in the performance of one writing so straightforwardly, and without the coquetries of embroidery, as Mendelssohn. Accordingly, his performance has none of the exquisite *finesses* of Moscheles, on the score of which it has been elsewhere said

that "there is wit in his playing;" — none of the delicate and plaintive and spiritual seductions of Chopin, who sweeps the keys with so insinuating and gossamer a touch, that the crudest and most chromatic harmonies of his music float away under his hand, indistinct yet not unpleasing, like the wild and softened discords of the Æolian harp; — none of the brilliant extravagancies of Liszt, by which he illuminates every composition he undertakes, with a living but lightening fire, and imparts to it a soul of passion, or a dazzling vivacity, the interpretation never contradicting the author's intention, but more poignant, more intense, more glowing than ever the author dreamed of. And yet, no one that has heard Mendelssohn's piano-forte playing can find it dry — can fail to be excited and fascinated by it, despite of its want of all the caprices and colourings of his contemporaries. Solidity, in which the organ touch is given to the piano without the organ ponderosity — spirit (witness his execution to the *finale* of the D minor concerto) animating, but never intoxicating the ear —

expression which, making every tone sink deep, requires not the garnishing of trills and *appoggiaturi*, or the aid of changes of time, — are among its outward and salient characteristics; but, within and beyond all these, though hard to be conveyed in words, there is to be felt a mind clear and deep, an appreciation of character and form which refers to the inner spirit rather than the outward details: the same which gives so exquisitely southern a character to the barcarole and the gondola tune in Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte," and its fresh, Ossianic, sea-wildness to his overture to the "Hebriden" ("Isles of Fingal"); — the same which enabled him, when little more than a boy, in the happiest piece of descriptive music of our time, to illustrate Shakspeare's exquisite faëry scenes neither feebly nor unworthily.* Execu-

* Perhaps it may be permitted me to quote from a note on this very composition published some few years ago. "I can never forget the delight awakened in me by the first hearing of the overture to the 'Midsummer Night's Dream;'— how it brought before me those delicious scenes in the old Athenian wood; — how I saw Cobweb, Pease-blossom, Moth, and Mustard-seed keeping up a

tion without grimace — fancy cheerful and excursive but never morbid — and feeling under the control of a serene, not sluggish spirit; — I can come no nearer pleasing myself in a character, than by these words, which are still far from doing justice to their subject. One word more, which is perhaps a half-definition. — Mendelssohn's is eminently manly music; and loses effect, beyond that of almost any other of his contemporaries, when attempted by female hands.

The Concerto and the Serenade were too soon over — things to be regretted as not lasting longer, for the sake of the manner in which they

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ceaseless gambol among the violets, or frolicking in their new flower-liveries round their queen, Titania; — how I watched the elfin heralds stealing noiselessly hither and thither through the dimmer thickets, and then, of a sudden, sharply winding their woodbine horns to bid tiny guests to the revel, with such ancient, quaint hairy heads peeping from between the under boughs of the trees, as gleam out of the distant corners of some of Ratzsch's designs. Nay, I even imagined I could detect the snore from the 'ass's nowl' of the enchanted Bottom breaking through the sweet music of the faëry troop." — *Conti the Discarded*, vol. ii. p. 264.

were performed, and because they were almost the last music of the meeting. The applause which attended them was what might have been expected — what was deserved. Then came the beautiful Symphony by Beethoven, which was hardly relished according to its merits,— for who can settle himself to enjoy a last pleasure? — then drove up the primitive equipages and the remarkable charioteers I had watched arrive, in such a different mood, but three days before; and the glory of "the celebrity" — as Dr. Burney primly called the Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey — was over!

No one that has ever attended an English Musical Festival in the provinces can have forgotten the flatness and desolation which succeeds it; — the doleful sight of travelling carriages packed, and musical instruments departing, and the destruction of decorations only a few days before surveyed with such complacent hopefulness as makes temporary lath-

and-plaster work imposing, and coarse red baize magnificent. How well do I remember, in the Amphitheatre at Liverpool on such an occasion, when the last notes of the concert had hardly sounded and the company had only one half departed, — watching Malibran as she sate carelessly on the edge of the orchestra, and followed, with her half arch half melancholy eye, the rude and immediate attack upon all the temporary decorations, of a legion of grimy operatives, who made the axe and the hammer re-echo, where so lately had been heard her voice, and the plaudits which had replied to it. I see her now as she then was — bright and triumphant in the early days of her English triumphs, with something in her face of the artlessness of a child, more of the resolution of a woman who has struggled and suffered; her features clear of those haggard lines which of late deepened and saddened their meaning. She was then in the fresh morning of her powers; her voice was untouched by the wear and tear of ceaseless exertion, her enthusiasm guiltless of those strange and audacious flights by

which, subsequently, it seemed almost necessary for her to stimulate herself so as to support her constant intercourse with a public little less capricious than herself, and far less instructed. I have before me her statue-like head, bound with a fine Venetian chain, — a golden crescent hung in the centre of her forehead; and the little dark velvet mantle in which she nestled, with the prettiest coquetry possible, while she kept in play half a dozen of the committee-men in office who crowded round her, finding it easier to stare at one so fascinating than to reply to one so ready-witted. Perhaps the casual meeting with ——, who was a good deal bound up with my music of those days, did its part in calling up that vivid phantom as I strolled hotel-wards down the untidily-kept avenue of the Medicinisches Garten at Brunswick.

There was nothing, at all events, in the aspect of that friendly-looking ancient town to remind any one of those woful days of "reckoning when the banquet's o'er" which must be endured in England. The table at the Blauen

Engel was as full as usual; the indescribables with which it was spread were as usual consumed, "lustily," as the psalm says, "and with good courage." My lot cast me into the neighbourhood of a very gentlemanly and agreeable officer from ——, but the subject of our conversation was any thing but gratifying — it being the coarse and disgraceful outbreaks by which certain of King Ernest of Hanover's satellites had recently managed to degrade the name of Englishman in the country. It would have indeed been folly to expect other results from personages already so well known at home as the offenders. He who has graduated in what is miscalled "Life in London" does not change his skin easily, neither the *roué* his spots. But it is humiliating to have these things retailed to one when from home. It is true that, had my friend been a Brunswicker, as a Londoner I was possessed of materials for the most ample and triumphant retort. As it was, I was glad to change the subject for the Harz country, and Mademoiselle Löwe, of the Berlin Opera, — a never-failing topic.

So often as I sate down to table, or entered a public conveyance, this lady's gifts and graces were extolled to me with warm commendation as the best thing in North Germany.

Dinner was despatched in greater haste than usual, and the guests were banding together in plans for the rest of the day, — the favourite one being a ride of seven miles along the newly completed railroad to Wolfenbuttel, where a *Café Turc*, with its excellent band of music, opens its doors to gratify the national propensity for coffee-house and tea-garden meetings. Less than this contented me; and, having desired the *oberkellner* to secure me a place in the diligence to Goslar early the next morning, and a *sperr-sitz* for the opera that evening, I gave myself up to the moment, and strolled out to have one more look at a pleasant place I was not likely soon to see again. My hour's ramble was principally occupied in admiring the outside of the Palace, the new building by Herr Ottmer, already celebrated among the musicians by his excellent and classical Sing-Academie at Berlin, and who is, if I mistake not, a Brunswicker. If so,

he has worthily enriched his own town with a building sufficiently magnificent in its proportions and chaste in its ornament to shame our new Pimlico Palace — that tawdry heap of deformity which I would fain have foreigners pass with closed eyes. Nor was it a small pleasure, while sauntering round this fine building, and regaling myself among the orange-trees which border its terraces, to encounter so many good-humoured and well-dressed groups of all classes and conditions: so the afternoon hour went over tranquilly and agreeably, till it was time to drop into my place at the Hof Theater.

The Opera House at Brunswick is agreeably sized; indeed, all the theatres in Germany I saw appeared to me well proportioned; if small, without that feeling of confinement — if large, without that obtrusive vastness, which severally make our London majors and minors so comfortless, in spite of the superior beauty of their decorations. The Ducal box is to the left of the stage, and the first row of stalls was exclusively occupied by blue uniform coats and bullion epaulettes; the whole caparison so redolent of tobacco, that

one regretted it should be worn by such clean-limbed, comely wearers. Hospitality and civility, I have said, are in the air of Brunswick. In England, we are too apt to behave in our public places, to the neighbours Chance sends us, as though every look we gave them was a demonstration defensive of home, hearth, and pocket, against false Counts de Tracy and other such gentry; or if we lay aside our surliness and break through that barricade of monosyllabic remark, — the "fluide Britannique," with which George Sand charges us, — it is to overdo civility and become indiscreetly familiar. Between the acts of the opera, I was claimed, by one of the most agreeably intelligent gentlemen I ever encountered, whom I had all the week admired at the *table d'hôte*, for the care he took of his charge — two young ladies; and because his head reminded me of the beautiful and spiritual sketch in oil of Thorwaldsen brought from Rome by Rothwell. Not only now did he give me more information than I was able to take in and remember, about the objects of natural and scientific interest in the district I was bound for; but he encouraged

one of his shy, gentle-looking companions to talk to the stranger on lighter topics, with an obvious pride in her excellent English, manifested by a complacent smile at every remark she made, which was very engaging. I could not but think, while profiting by this good nature, how differently matters go at home, and how little chance any ill-dressed foreigner, with two travelling words of the language in his mouth — the "How much?" for instance, that inquiry introducing the innocent German in England to such a painful acquaintance with the different values of money — would run of having his evening's pleasure in one of our theatres thus enhanced.

But I am writing of music as well as manners. I had naturally anticipated my first opera in Germany with great interest. At Hamburg I had been unlucky — missing, by one evening, "Robert le Diable," and making one of an audience of ninety or thereabouts, scattered up and down the capacious theatre of that town, to witness the easy genteel comedy of Madame Lenz, and to wonder at the quan-

tity of paint, in the shape of age and wrinkles, which the Uncle of the piece (I know not his name) had contrived to put on. My expectations, it is true, were not immoderate. I feared, from my experiences of the Festival, that I should find voices better willed than taught to sing, and actors whose physical powers were a little at variance with the characters they undertook to represent,—a Juliet of a certain age, and of a matronly port — a Romeo guiltless of figure, but not guiltless of an obtrusive display of his deficiencies, by dress and gesture. But I had some experience of German orchestras and choruses; some hope, thanks to Herr Kapellmeister Methfessel, to listen to good music ; and it never had occurred to me that I was to come to the Brunswick Festival to hear M. Halèvy's "Guido and Ginevra," — a work not particularly popular in its birth-place, Paris, though there aided by the magnificent voice and magnificent acting of Duprez.

There are some stories for which novelists and dramatists have a hankering thoroughly unaccountable. One is this same legend of the *Strada*

della Morte in Florence,—which in Magdeburg is given to the Frau von Assenburgh's monument, —and in England, I now forget to which Abbey Church vault: —a legend which not even Leigh Hunt's rich and delicate poetry and fine conception of character * have been able to popularise

* The "Legend of Florence" has been the subject of so much excellent criticism, that I may be thought superfluous in thus once again alluding to its superior merits. Still it seems to me that one of its strongest points of excellence has been overlooked,—I mean the character of Agolanti, as a study of bad temper. To make so ignoble a failing an object of sympathy is impossible; it is but the grander crimes and the grander passions which exercise a fascinating influence. But in Mr. Hunt's play there is an individuality thrown into the part of the harsh and cruel husband, which makes him far overtop all his other fellow-actors, and gives his unjust doings a share in our interest as well as their sorrows. He has his trials as well as Ginevra. He has within him that dark and perverted spirit, which makes him strong in his own warped sense of predominance and authority: he is beset without by a herd of gay, communicative, interfering people, whose very presence is hateful to one so grave and reserved; and who, while they plead with him and lecture him, are totally unable to comprehend the terrible possession under the influence of which he inflicts the wrongs they would benevolently redress. He is, in short, altogether the man of real life, not the unredeemed villain

with us. The French librettist M. Scribe,—unlike the rest who have been led away by one or two effective situations to treat a subject in its interest singularly morbid, and in its close altogether intractable,—has set these in the midst of horrors of great melodramatic potency, and thus made up a book, after its coarse kind, exceedingly effective. It may be this, yet more than a tendency to play French Opera, which has helped to insure for "Guido and Ginevra" a popularity in Germany, never gained by it in Paris. This was its first performance in Brunswick.

The parts were thus distributed:—

Cosmo de Medicis - -	*Herr Fischer.*
Ginevra, his daughter -	*Madame Fischer Achten.*
Manfred, Duke of Ferrara -	*Herr Pöck.*
Guido, a young painter -	*Herr Schmetzer.*
Ricciarda, a singer - -	*Dem. Fanny Mejo.*
Leonora, a lady in waiting -	*Madame Gerard.*
Lorenzo, Chamberlain of the de Medicis - - -	*Herr Gerard.*

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whom "limners love to paint, and ladies to look upon;" and there are few figures in the list of modern creation so simply and clearly conceived, so simply and completely wrought out.

Fortebraccio, a leader of banditti -	*Herr Bussmeyer.*
Teobaldo, Sacristan of the Cathedral of Florence - - - - -	*Herr Kahn.*
Antoinette, a young peasant -	*Dem. Schmidt.*
&c. &c. &c.	

In writing of the component parts of German opera, at least as far as I know it, according to the degrees of merit, first should come the chorus and orchestra; then the singers in combination; then the stage arrangements; lastly, the singers individually considered. But yet more than by the orchestra, for which M. Halévy's music offers such ample occupation, — and yet more than by the chorus, which, in the "Guido," is put to sing the poorest music in which any national style was ever attempted,—was I struck with the exceeding propriety and sedulousness with which the opera was got up. The stage arrangements at Brunswick were the first illustrations I witnessed in Germany, of the skill and intelligence which are brought to bear upon every performance; no matter what the means may be — no matter what the scale on which it is produced. As the grumbler I met in the

Salle Bergère expressed it, much of the music of M. Halévy is written "for the eye."* Thus, in the "Guido," the first act has the *festa* of the Madonna de l'Arco; the third, a double scene, the upper portion of which displays a dim and mouldering chapel, with a remote perspective of heavy columns and arches draperied with banners, and hung with heraldic escutcheons; the one requiring prodigality as to numbers and decorations — the other, space. Both were afforded on a stage of no very eminent dimensions, the former from a wardrobe and store of properties any thing but dazzling. These may be thought unimportant matters by

* That I may not deal too sweepingly in definitions, I ought to remind the reader that if "La Juive" of M. Halévy gained its success by the aid of spectacle, he has on the other hand ventured in his comic opera, "L'Eclair," an experiment, the like of which is not tolerated on the stage, save in "Il Matrimonio Segreto." "L'Eclair" has no chorus, and only four characters; and the music is well esteemed in Paris. To myself, I confess, it appears dry and frivolous; and its acceptance ascribable to the dramatic skill and finish which distinguishes all the presentments at the Opera Comique. If I am not unjust, then, "L'Eclair," as well as "La Juive," is, in some degree, "music for the eye."

those profound judges of Art who would dispense with all such adjuncts as being meretricious and in false taste, and even go the length of wishing that the experiment should be tried of declaiming Shakspeare's plays after the naked and unadorned traditions of the Globe and Fortune; — that is, with a sign-board brought in to acquaint the gazer that the scene is Illyria; or to tell him that he had crossed from "the loyal Leonatus" in Rome, to the British chamber of Imogen. Why not, also, if this were indeed expedient, or even reverent, permit some "squeaking Cleopatra" to "boy the greatness" of the Egyptian queen, or insist that Lady Macbeth should be presented with the down of adolescence upon her lip and chin — because such things were in the original performances? It is a like blind imitation which has led some of the artists of Young Germany and Young France, not only to travesty themselves in the toque or pourpoint of their models; but also to imagine that because Fra Beato and Raphael painted nettle-sprigs for trees, in the back-grounds of their

scriptural pieces, they must do the same; as if, by such undistinguishing admiration, they might emulate the Madonnas and the angelic hierarchies of their predecessors. Surely, the imperishable genius, and the imperfect utterance of it belonging to the mechanical attainments of any special æra, rest upon widely different traditions, and bear widely different values.

But, at this rate, I shall never get to the end of "Guido and Ginevra." The execution of M. Halévy's music by the orchestra and chorus was very good, though short, of course, of the high finish of L'Académie Royale. To have looked for this would have been preposterous: the wonder is, not that the truest style and the most delicate polish should not be entirely attained, but that correctness and firmness of performance should be possible under the circumstances. In the present state of opera in Germany, not only is a constant change of performances part of every system of management, but a constant change of schools. You will hear, one night, "L'Elisir d'Amore;" the

next, "La Sonnambula,"—"Le Postillon de Loujumeau," as a certainty,—nor less certainly Meyerbeer's "Robert,"—however limited be the resources of the theatre;—*I hope*, in their turn, the operas of Mozart and Weber; though I know that the Brunswick singers, Herrn Pöck and Schmetzer, when recently in London, were somewhat unprepared for the classical music of their own country which they were called upon to perform. Thus, not only is it next to impossible that there should be any settlement of style as regards performance, such as at once decides the individuality of a French orchestra, but the number of rehearsals must also necessarily be very limited. All the musical world knows to what extent the composer's privilege in this respect is carried at the Parisian Opera; where, again, his ministers in the orchestra have not to contend with a strange and antipathetic music. I do not suppose that it would be possible with French singers, and under French direction, even at the great metropolitan theatre, to "get together" the "Euryanthe" of Weber in twice the time

which, probably, in Brunswick was devoted to the study of the "Guido and Ginevra." As for England, who can have forgotten the outcry of self-praise raised upon the very mediocre performance of "Guillaume Tell" at Drury Lane, which is now a stock-piece in every little theatre throughout Germany? We must not speak of England, when opera is the subject. The neatness of Herr Methfessel's orchestra particularly struck me, in one passage of Ginevra's great tomb scene, where a rapidly moving accompaniment of groups of six semiquavers, passes from tenor to bass, in an unbroken and close *pizzicato*, requiring much firmness to maintain, as our Italian Opera violin players know, who never could be made, even by Signor Costa, to draw out a similar but far simpler passage, in the last movement of the grand terzett in "Guillaume Tell," with any thing like clearness or certainty. The female chorus I thought crude in tone; but its part in the opera lies high, and frequently in those extreme keys which the elder composers judiciously avoided, even in days when the diapason

of the orchestra was some half a tone lower than it is now.

After the orchestra and chorus come the principal singers. They went through their parts moderately well, but no more. Indeed, the peculiar structure of the French language, piquant in its separate words, but lending itself so unwillingly to rhythmical purposes, that the elongated "patri-*ē*," and "voya-*ge̅*," become indispensable; stamps, too, so much individuality of form upon its music, that the latter, when mated with a translated text, becomes singularly ungracious to speakers and singers. Even Rossini's "Guillaume Tell," which is not wholly French, loses (so to say) its *bouquet*, when given with Italian words. How much more must the music of M. Halévy suffer,—every note of which tells of Paris and the Conservatoire,—by being fitted with the heavier and less tractable German rhymes and phrases! Hence, the efforts of the vocal *corps*, though satisfactory, were very laborious. Herr Schmetzer, as all London knows, is not the person best fitted by Nature to enact the part of a love-lorn swain.

He had attired himself, too, with singular courage: and having forborne, by "planting out" the flatnesses of his face after the picturesque fashion of Italian heroes, to give his beautiful voice the chance of seeming to issue from chivalric lips, — the painful contortions of his fat tenderness amounted to the ridiculous. I never saw him without thinking of one of Jan Steen's saints and martyrs. But he sung the exquisitely mannered romance in the first act tolerably sentimentally; and in the great tomb scene, where he goes down into the vault to bewail his beloved, ere her trance breaks, as a deep and friendly shadow veiled his gesticulations, he was forcible and impressive. Herr Pöck, the Agolanti of the opera, performed the cruel husband's part with that manly, muscular spirit, and that amplitude of crude tone, which have since made him so popular in London, and must lead every one to regret that position or inclination has caused him to neglect the refinements of vocal cultivation. Madame Fischer-Achten, again, though chargeable with that maturity of person which, to English eyes, amounts to so

serious a drawback, pleased me more than any *prima donna* I was afterwards to hear, by a fair *soprano* voice capable of neat and easy execution, and a truth and intensity of passion of which our operatic ladies rarely dream. The actor who played Fortebraccio, the hired assassin, by whose ministry Ginevra is poisoned, at the instance of her rival, the courtezan Ricciarda, was at once feeble and heavy; and elaborate in his attempts to give the dash of cowardly and superstitious humour which the part requires to relieve the odium of his mercenary villany. But the attempt was made: the whole corps, indeed, was in possession of the story as well as of the music, and carried the audience along with them. Nor is a German audience difficult to carry along, — being at once fair and patient, willing and enthusiastic: — how different from that heterogeneous assembly of *blasè* and uninstructed persons who assemble at home to pronounce upon a new opera! I should have been ashamed of myself, could I have there criticised by the stop-watch, and forborne to bear them company.

On the contrary, I, too, was carried away to my heart's content, — for the moment as ready to maintain the superexcellence of the Brunswick corps, as if I had never heard a Pasta, or a Duprez, or a Lablache; — my dreams of "Fidelio," "Euryanthe," and "Alceste," all forgotten. To the credit of our good taste, "Guido and Ginevra" has never, like other French operas, been played in England, with or without music; so I may just mention that, to heighten the story with an additional dose of horror, the scene is laid in Florence, during the time of the plague, and the death of Ginevra is compassed by the mercenary Fortebraccio selling to her an infected veil. In the fourth act, after she has been delivered from the tomb by the band of plunderers who descend thither to strip the rings from her fingers, Poetical Justice — crammed down the throats of the audience by M. Scribe, in doses which are *not* homoepathic — ordains that the pestilence should strike the husband, who has refused to receive her, and that upon his wretched mistress showing terror and cowardice, and attempting to escape, he

should drag her towards him, and declare, frantically, that she is his, for life and death! Grossly repulsive as is the melodrame of this situation, I was for the moment all eye and ear, and so engrossingly wound up to the highest pitch of attention, as to be annoyed by a whispering in my neighbourhood, and impatient at having my coat-sleeve plucked. I turned at last — to meet a dozen moist, heated, earnest faces, looking furious things at me for my impassiveness in not having earlier attended to a summons which by this time was disturbing all the *parterre*.

It was a moment before a romantic theory of *espionage* and Police connected with my questioner in the black velvet coat had flashed past me. Who *could* want me? There he stood — the civil, fat, flustered *oberkellner* of the Blauen Engel, mopping his forehead, and quite too much out of breath to speak. Cruickshank or Phiz might have designed his look of upbraiding impatience at the tardiness with which the truth broke upon me, that the *eilwagen* for Goslar started, not, as I had pleased to suppose, at eight

on the following morning, but at ten that very night, — the third quarter after nine having already struck; my bill still unpaid, and my baggage still unpacked. Greater became the honest man's disapproval, when he found that I could only laugh at the blunder — only laugh while scouring the streets at his heels to the astonishment of the placid evening pleasurers — only laugh at the scene awaiting me in my comfortless little room. There the entire household, from Herr Driesen, the landlord, down to the least male thing in his employ, was bent on the hospitable duty of "speeding the parting guest;" one, cramming away an odd stocking — another, a bunch of pens and this journal — a third, in his zeal to economize space, and to give me every tittle that rightfully belonged to me, all but emptying a half-finished *kruke* of Seltzer water into the compartment of my portmanteau allotted to clean linen. It was all in vain: the clock struck the fatal hour long ere the task was done; and the thalers paid for my place must needs be sacrificed. It was vexatious, with them, to have

lost the end of "Guido and Ginevra," which I know not even to this day. The rest was all easy enough. It was easy to resign myself to another night in Brunswick, and to take vehicle the next day for Halberstadt, which, though not in the direct route, was equally eligible with Goslar as a starting point to the Harz country.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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